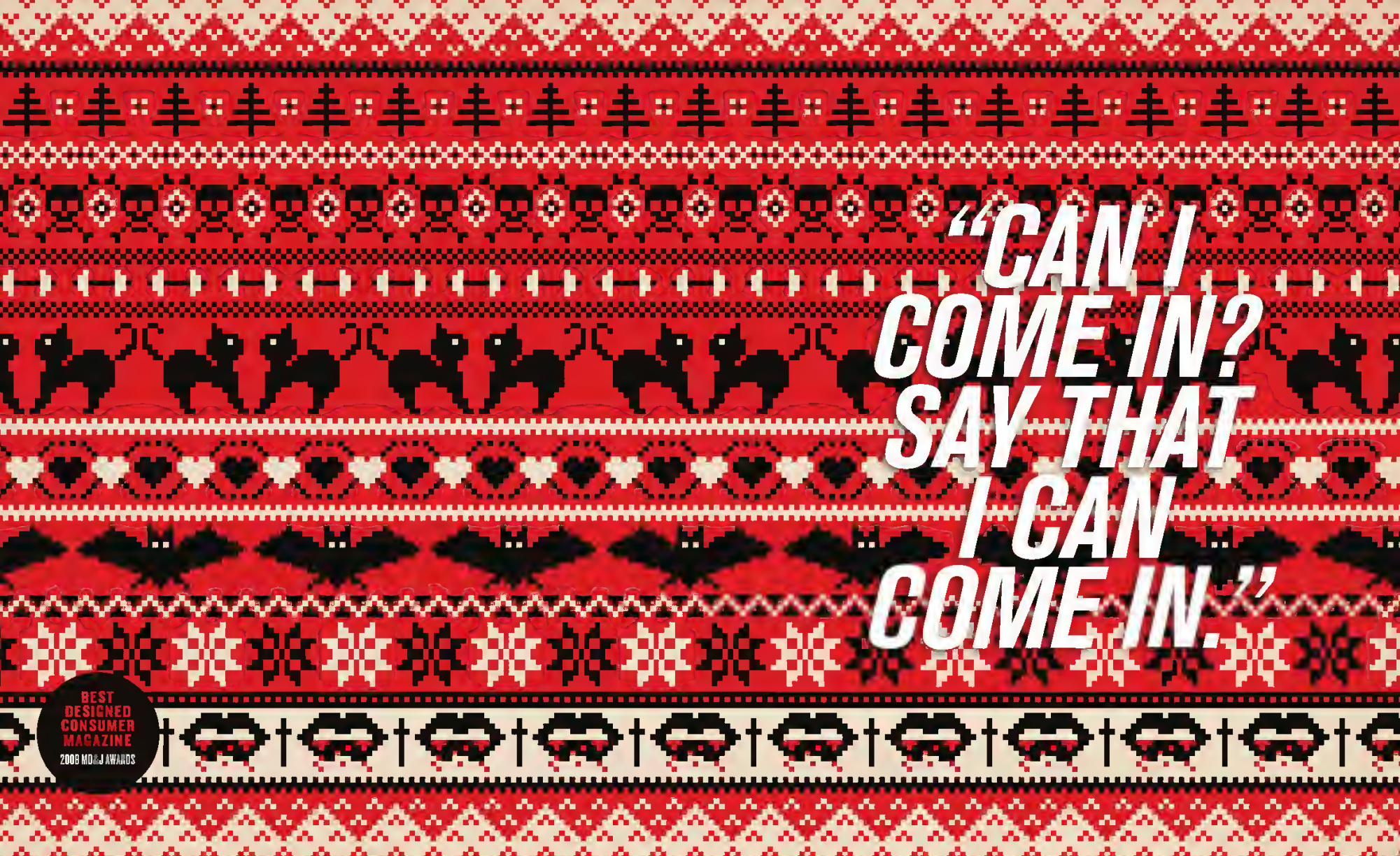
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LITTLE WHITE LIES

Truth & Movies

the LET THE RIGHT ONE IN issue




"CAN I COME IN? SAY THAT I CAN COME IN."
BEST DESIGNED CONSUMER MAGAZINE
2008 MD&J AWARDS


Chapter One
In which we discuss
Let the Right One In



TOMAS ALFREDSON'S STUNNING SWEDISH LOVE STORY HAS RE-INVENTED THE VAMPIRE FILM.



"IN A GENRE THAT FETISHISES DEATH, THIS IS A FILM INVESTED WITH LIFE. IT'S AN ANTI-HORROR MOVIE, A PERIOD PIECE GROUNDED IN THE STRUGGLES OF SOCIAL REALITY."

Tomas Alfredson has defied all expectations. He's taken the most self-reflexive of genres and re-invented it with a single, stunning film. Unquestionably subversive, at times transcendent, *Let The Right One In* reintroduces the vampire – that creature of myth and madness – to the real world. Gone are the clichés, replaced by a story of uncertain friendship and fragile love, of social reality and dark fantasy.

Based on the novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist, Alfredson's film takes us deep into the heart of Sweden's frigid suburbs. Blackeberg, 1982: the cold settles like a steel weight, expelling warmth and life and hope. Scuttling across concrete streets, rundown people lead rundown lives – inmates in a frozen cell.

Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) is a 12-year old boy out of kilter with this world. So pale he's almost translucent, so physically unimposing he's practically invisible, one strong snowstorm could blow him away. But escape is elusive for Oskar. Bullied at school, he buries himself in a scrapbook of violent murders, friendship substituted for fantasy.

And then one night Eli (Lina Leandersson) enters Oskar's life and changes it forever. Eli is... different. Her hair is black and matted, her face smudged with dirt. Only a thin pink shirt protects her against the snow. "Don't you feel the cold?" asks Oskar. "No," she replies. "Why not?" "I think I've forgotten how."

They meet in a shallow pool of light cast by a streetlamp, a sickly halo thrown over a rusting playground. Outside that light lurks the thick, unknowable night, but inside Oskar finds someone to protect him from the darkness. Even though there are questions about Eli he can't answer. Even though a serial killer is stalking the streets of his town. Even though the dangers of that black night beyond the street lamp have already stepped into the light.

Adapting his own book, Lindqvist has been forced to smooth out the kinkier creases. Much of what's permissible in print is simply too extreme for cinema (like an attempted-rape scene that would land the filmmakers in jail if they put it on screen). So compromises have been made – Alfredson only addresses the novel's homoeroticism in a single shot, a blink-and-you'll-miss-it image that'll leave you gasping. Likewise, Eli's accomplice, Håkan, a paedophile in print, now has a more ambiguous (even sympathetic) motive to explain his actions.

But if some of the book's more conventional horror elements – its Stephen King moments – have been wisely excised, elsewhere it's harder to explain why certain material has been left out. No reference is made to the fact that Oskar wets himself, and while it's clear enough that he's a victim, it's crucial that we understand the depths of his humiliation.

clip



before he meets Eli for his later actions to ring true. But if the film is a more timid beast than the novel, Lindqvist and Alfredson have largely succeeded in capturing its essence while turning out its excesses.

Most importantly, Alfredson's film mirrors the subversive quality of Lindqvist's book. This is no ordinary horror movie. In a genre that fetishises death, *Let The Right One In* is a film invested with life. It's an anti-horror movie, a period piece grounded in the struggles of social reality. When Lacke (Peter Carlberg) and his girlfriend Virginia (Ika Nord) discuss nuclear hysteria and the upcoming elections, these aren't just real life details (in 1982, a Soviet sub ran aground in sight of a Swedish naval base, and Thorbjorn Fälldin's government was on the verge of defeat); they're the kind of details that provide the backdrop to real lives. The town of Blackeberg may be populated by drunks, drug addicts and two-time losers, but they aren't just stereotypes waiting to be fed to the meat grinder.

So when it happens, when this world lurches on its axis and the killing starts, you won't – you can't – disconnect yourself from these characters. Unlike films at the seedier end of the spectrum, you're not invited to share in the anticipation of death – idly wondering how inventive or aesthetic or exciting it might be – you're forced to fear it.

This emotional maturity brilliantly strips the film, and the audience, of its moral compass. Without a clear sense of good and evil, Alfredson is able to orchestrate our sympathies with masterful misdirection. Yes, it's manipulative... but by the time the motive for the killing becomes clear, we feel both Oskar's sympathy for the killer, as well as Lacke's anguish for the victim.

That the film is able to enter such murky moral territory is due in part to the fact that it divests the vampire of its glamour. However conflicted screen vampires have been, the image of the undead speaks to our most seductive fantasies – power, immortality, sexuality. But *Let The Right One In* flips that on its head. Not just because Eli preys on our assumptions of innocence – who, after all, could fear a little girl? – but also because her existence is a small, squalid and lonely one. Eli may be the first vampire you wouldn't gladly trade lives with.

But if you're going to introduce a vampire to the real world, sooner or later you have to address an awkward issue: what do you call it? Because we know about 'vampires' – we've seen them in films – but nobody believes, nobody *could* believe, that they're real. Not even if you saw one in an underpass sucking blood from a corpse. And especially not if this vampire was your only friend...



"IT'S THIS JUXTAPOSITION BETWEEN THE DOMESTIC AND THE DIABOLICAL THAT GIVES THE FILM ITS POWER."

clip

By forcing his characters to face the absurdity, the impossibility, of what they see in front of them, Alfredson deftly crosses a fourth wall. It's as if, by uttering the word 'vampire' out loud, some taboo is shattered, and all the barriers between the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible break down completely.

Let The Right One In takes us beyond the comfort zone of horror, and perhaps that's why it isn't so much scary as disconcerting. The fear of the unknown, the fear of the unseen, the fear of evil – all have been subtly undermined. In fact, the film's scariest scene sees Håkan washing a bucket, tubing and funnel in his kitchen. There's something about his quiet determination that's far more disturbing than seeing the same tools employed after he's strung a young boy to a tree and cut his throat.

It's this juxtaposition between the domestic and the diabolical that gives the film its power. The classroom, the home, the local pool, these are the tawdry, tedious spaces of normal life. That the word 'vampire' should shatter their illusive sanctuary is like a physical violation. And if, on occasion, the scenes of violence that occur here seem almost comically inappropriate to the audience's eyes, we're simply sharing the reaction of the film's characters, struggling to accept what they're seeing.

At all times, Alfredson's focus is not on the aesthetic but the realistic. Which is not to say that his film isn't beautiful. It opens on an image of snowflakes falling like silent angels, conjuring the icy otherworldliness of this innocent, isolated town. It's these moments of beauty that lift *Let The Right One In* out of oppressive darkness. At it's heart, after all, it's a love story between two people on the brink of childhood, one learning to reclaim it, the other to let it go. It's in those quiet moments between Eli and Oskar that the real meaning of the film's title is revealed, referring to the heart, not just the home.

Oddly evocative of Miyazaki's *Castle in the Sky*, this love story is all the more heartfelt for its faltering, adolescent uncertainty. When Eli comes to Oskar's room one night, fresh from feeding, she climbs in behind him. Unable to see her face, he asks her to be his girlfriend. "Will anything change?" she wonders. "No," he replies. "Then okay." As they lie there, listening to Eli's heartbeat, the film reaches a moment of transcendence where innocence, horror and love each dissolve into the other.

Alfredson and Lindqvist have crafted a modern fairy tale that stands comparison with the work of Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm. In its collision of fantasy and reality, darkness and light, love and loss, *Let The Right One In* has simply swept aside the rest of the genre, and proved conclusively that horror thrills don't have to come cheap. **Matt Bochenski**

Anticipation. Racked up festivals awards all over the world, picking up unprecedented word of mouth. 5

Enjoyment. A true original: love story, horror film and social drama. At once brilliant in its parts, and more than the sum of them. 5

In Retrospect. Perhaps could have gone further in exploring the book's psychosexual subtext, but everything that's made it to the screen will stick with you. 4

Movie with... >page 38 for an interview with *Let The Right One In* director Tomas Alfredson



IF *LET THE RIGHT ONE IN* HAS STIRRED A HUNGER FOR BLOOD IN YOUR BELLY, FEAST ON THESE OTHER OFFBEAT VAMPIRE CLASSICS



trailer

NOSFERATU: PHANTOM DER NACHT (1979)

DIRECTED BY Werner Herzog

Now that FW Murnau's 1922 classic is so firmly situated in the mainstream, it hardly seems worth revisiting it. Instead, try Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht*, which proves that the whole *Bad Lieutenant* re-make farrago isn't just a recent madness. Herzog waited until 1979 to re-imagine the film that he considered the greatest of all Germany's expressionist masterpieces. With Bram Stoker's copyright now in the public domain he was free to set his story of Jonathan Harker and the mysterious Count Dracula on his own plane of reality, complete with an intense turn from Klaus Kinski.

trailer

SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE (2000)

DIRECTED BY E Elias Merhige

It's not often that Herzog is out-crazed, but for an altogether more perverse take on the myth of Murnau, you won't find anything more warped than *Shadow of the Vampire*. A brilliant synthesis of historical recreation, film-within-a-film meta-movie and old-fashioned clichés, *Shadow* follows the production of 'Nosferatu' to Czechoslovakia where Murnau (played by John Malkovich) has hired an unusual actor (Willem Dafoe as Max Schreck as a real vampire) to play the lead. Knowing and audacious Merhige's debut film is the ultimate artistic 'making of' from the dawn of the DVD age.

trailer

BLOOD FOR DRACULA (1974)

DIRECTED BY Paul Morrissey

More commonly known as *Andy Warhol's Dracula*, Paul Morrissey's virulent social satire stars the mouth watering combination of Udo Kier, Joe Dallesandro and Vittorio de Sica. Violent, explicit but also dated *Blood For Dracula* sees a sickly Count (Kier) travel to Italy on the hunt for some good Catholic virgins whose blood he can suck. Invited into the home of the ailing Marchese Di Fiore (De Sica) he sets about determining the purity of the court's aristocratic daughters, while a brooding peasant (Dallesandro) makes Dracula's job that bit more difficult. Despite Kier's outrageous accent, it's a more serious film than you might expect from the self-ed ulgent Factory crowd, with a finely tuned social conscience and plenty of gore.

trailer

MARTIN (1977)

DIRECTED BY George A Romero

A year before dawn broke over the dead, George Romero put zombies aside to make this little-seen detour into the world of the vampire. Hardcore fans will tell you that this story about a sexually troubled adolescent who believes he's a vampire (and goes around murdering women to prove it) is the director's best work. It's certainly a subversive, challenging piece that cleverly plays on our knowledge of the genre, and presciently links vampirism to drug addiction and sexual insecurity.

clip

DRACULA: PAGES FROM A VIRGIN'S DIARY (2002)

DIRECTED BY Guy Maddin

Who else but Guy Maddin would have the nerve to re-interpret Bram Stoker's novel as a ballet, and re-cast Dracula as Chinese actor Wei-Qiang Zhang? Taking its cue from Gustav Mahler and the clever conceit of a 'found' silent film (the actors mouth the dialogue which is communicated through title cards) *Pages From A Virgin's Diary* rips up the familiar script and starts all over again. Shot on 16mm and Super 8, black-and-white with strange splashes of blood red, the result is as mesmerising as it is disconcerting. But then that's Maddin all over.

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Let the right one in
Let the old dreams die
Let the wrong ones go
They do not
They do not
They do not see what you want them to
Oh...

Let the right one in
Let the old things fade
Put the tricks and schemes (for good) away

I will advise
Until my mouth dries
I will advise you to...

Let the right one slip in
Slip in
Slip in

And when at last it does
I'd say you were within your rights to bite
The right one and say, 'What kept you so long?
'What kept you so long?'
Oh...

Morrissey, 'Let The Right One Slip In'



LWLies:

What is it you love about movies?

Alfredson:

I would say movies' ability to capture time.
I first understood that when I was, like, six or
seven-years-old, and I had this little 8mm camera,
this machine that could compress time -
that is a wonderful thing.



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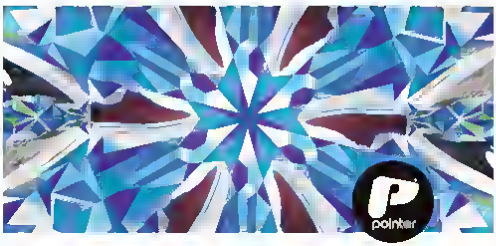
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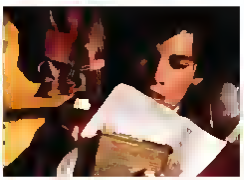
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The Berlin Film Festival may have captured the headlines in February but the real action in the German capital was happening at the wrap of the PlayStation Shoot! campaign. *LWLies* was there to support the project, a unique film competition that lit up the PlayStation Network before culminating in an awards ceremony at the Tausend club.

Six of the world's hottest young filmmakers were commissioned to make a short film inspired by the essence of PlayStation. Play. Create. Share. Connect. Discover and Challenge. And each was paired with a legendary mentor – including the likes of Thomas Vinterberg and Michael Winterbottom – to guide them through the significant challenges they faced.

The result was six outstanding films, each one thematically distinct but unified by both a technical excellence and cinematic integrity. The panel of judges was chaired by special guest Asta Dobroshi, who, after an intense debate, had the honour of presenting Best Film to Anthony Green for *The Dreaming*, Best Screenplay to Joel Wilson and Jamie Campbell on behalf of George Kay for *Bitter*, and an Honourable Mention to Uwe Flade's *Prison Food*.

It was a great event for a worthy cause, celebrating a new avenue for cinema on the PlayStation Network.







Clockwise from top left

BEST FILM: *The Dreaming*
Directed by Anthony Green

BEST SCREENPLAY: *Bitter*
Directed by Joel Wilson & Jamie Campbell

HONOURABLE MENTION
Prison Food Directed by Uwe Flade



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PlayStation Network SHORTS


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Chapter Three

In which we discuss themes of uncommon interest inspired by our feature film



There Will Be Blood.

FROM AIDS-AFFLICTED VILLAGES IN CHINA TO THE EDGE OF OUR AGELESS FUTURE; FROM THE BIOLOGY OF BLOODSUCKING TO THE COLD SWEDISH COUNTRYSIDE, LET LWLIES TAKE YOU BEYOND THE CLICHÉS OF VAMPIRE MYTHOLOGY.



BLOOD OF THE DRAGON.

THE ILLEGAL BLOOD TRADE IN CHINA'S HENAN PROVINCE HAS CREATED ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SCANDALOUS AIDS EPIDEMICS. FRENCH JOURNALIST PIERRE HASKI WAS ONE OF THE FEW WESTERNERS WHO WAS ABLE TO BEAR WITNESS.

WORDS BY PIERRE HASKI
ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL WILLOUGHBY

It was early in 2001, a few months after I became a foreign correspondent in Beijing, that I received an anonymous e-mail with a link to a website. There, I found a comprehensive description of an official blood trade in one of China's most populous provinces, and how it turned deadly for thousands of poor peasants contaminated with HIV/AIDS.

This detailed account mentioned an unbelievable figure: one million people affected. And it gave precise details, names, dates and quotes from officials in Henan province who decided on, implemented and covered up this disaster. If true, it would classify as one of the greatest scandals of the global AIDS epidemic in more than 20 years.

I was shocked, and puzzled. How could a scandal of this magnitude be hidden in a China which, while still an authoritarian country, could no longer as efficiently suppress information as the old days of Maoist rule? With hundreds of foreign journalists running around the country, could this accusation be true?

When foreign journalists take up their posting, they are made to sign a Foreign Ministry commitment to obey a set of rules. One of them specifies that journalists should not leave Beijing, the capital, without the prior approval of the place or institution they want to visit, be it a local government, a company, or a university.

Although no one respected this rule, you knew that you could get into trouble if the stakes were high for the government. Being new to China, I hesitated, but the Beijing rumour mill started feeding me with additional details about the AIDS villages of Henan, where peasants were dying in large numbers. I decided to go and check, whatever the risk. I couldn't imagine staying in Beijing when such a mass pandemic was happening just 600 miles away.



I flew to Zhangzhou, the capital of Henan, with no local contact other than the list of districts mentioned in the original text from the website. At the airport, I chose a young taxi driver and offered to pay him double if he agreed to be my driver for three days. He was thrilled and asked no questions.

My plan was simple: go from village to village, question five people in each location to check whether the rumours were true, and how widespread the contamination was. When we arrived at the first village, a woman was playing with her young son while her husband was working the land a few metres away. I asked the first question very carefully, not sure of how to approach it.

"Do you know of people who sold their blood in the 1990s?" I asked. "Yes, me," she answered. "Do you know of people who became sick out of it?" I followed up. "I've just returned from the hospital, and they told me I had the fever," she replied. Her husband came over at this point and asked me, "Do you think it's contagious?"

This was June 2001. This woman was HIV-positive, but had no idea about the nature of her illness. She and her family knew nothing of a virus that had been known in the rest of the world for most of the previous two decades. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, China pretended that AIDS didn't exist. The government didn't inform its citizens about the disease's transmission modes, and covered up cases like this one, due to official negligence.

During this first trip, I discovered that every adult had been selling their blood in the early 1990s, earning 40-50rmb (four to five euros) each time, a welcome income in this poor rural region of eastern Henan, a province with a population of 100 million, larger than any European country. But since then, every village had had its first deaths, its first orphans, its share of unexplained tragedy.

A strongly built man turned his arms to me and showed the scars of hundreds of needle holes. "Do you think I will also catch the fever?" he asked. How could I tell him that in this deadly game of Russian roulette, he had very few chances of escaping the virus?

In a house where I was taken, a man was dying under a mosquito net. Near his deathbed, there

"EVERY ADULT HAD BEEN SELLING BLOOD IN THE EARLY 1990s. BUT SINCE THEN, EVERY VILLAGE HAD HAD ITS FIRST DEATHS."

were empty bottles of fortifier, the only drug his family could afford. His wife was shattered, and his son, who had returned from a job in a coastal town to see his father die, couldn't contain his anger. How could I tell them there were anti-viral drugs that could slow the development of the infection, but that they could not access them?

I also learned more about the blood trade itself. How blood stations were either run directly by the government medical service, or by private sub-contractors, generally family members of local Communist Party officials. The blood was needed to produce fortifiers, which are very popular with China's health-conscious new middle-class.

Local health authorities thought they had hit upon a brilliant scheme for making money in a rural province lagging far behind its more dynamic coastal counterparts. But the combination of local officials intent on lining their pockets and blood collection centres lacking even the most basic hygiene and safety standards proved to be fatal.

Certain individuals in charge of the Henan health system were essentially condemning hundreds of thousands of innocent people to a death sentence. When HIV was discovered among some of the blood donors in the mid-90s, the authorities stopped the whole operation but didn't tell anyone the reason. There were even riots at the time because blood money had become a much needed source of income.

Not only did the authorities fail to warn the contaminated farmers that they carried a deadly disease, but they also failed to warn them that they could contaminate other people through sex or birth. So for the next decade, before the virus started biting, people from eastern Henan continued to have unprotected sex and have children without any knowledge they could give birth to HIV-positive babies, something that could have been easily avoided.

I wrote my first report on this scandal that same month. At the same time, *The New York Times* published the first interview with a remarkable woman, Dr Gao Yaojie, a Zhengzhou-based retired gynaecologist who was among the first to discover the HIV/AIDS contamination in some rural parts of her province. She tried to alert the authorities, only to find herself silenced and harassed after she spoke to the US reporter.

From that point, the scandal couldn't be hidden anymore. In a two-paragraph statement later that year the central government recognised that something had gone wrong in blood stations across Henan, and measures would be taken to deal with the issue. It also announced plans to reorganise blood stations across the country.



I went back to the same villages the next year, to assess what had changed, but I was in for another shock.

When we arrived in one of the villages we had visited a few months earlier, we found a very different situation. Villagers knew they carried HIV – they knew how they'd been contaminated – and they were very angry.

For two or three hours, a French photographer, a Chinese translator and myself went from home to home, listening to people who wanted to tell their story and were eager to be photographed, maybe their only chance before death. Eventually a police van came to arrest us: we had remained in the same place too long and had been reported to the authorities.

They asked us to get into our car and follow them. But something unexpected happened. Two women we had just interviewed lay down in front of our car to prevent us from leaving, and shouted to the police: "You have no right to detain them. At least they came and listened to us. You let us die without even listening."

The scene quickly developed into a crisis, and the policemen were taken hostage. A group of young, overexcited peasants took over the leadership, and explained that no one, including us, could leave the village unless some higher authority came and explained to them why they were left without any medical care.

Later in the day, the head of the district's health department drove into the village. He tried to argue with the angry villagers. But at one stage he lost his temper and told them, "In any case, you will all die." This was enough to start a riot. Immediately, the official's immaculate white car was set on fire, as well as the police van. Some elderly people came to us and advised that we should leave as the mood was turning vengeful against the outside world, including us. We followed her advice, but some angry youths caught up with us by cutting though the fields, and stopped our car on a dirt road.

They surrounded us and banged on the windows. They ordered us to leave the car, otherwise they would harm us and contaminate us. They knew their power. My translator bravely pulled her window down and talked to them. "You're making a mistake," she told them in a firm voice. "If you have any chance of getting assistance, it's because people like them left the comfort of Beijing and came to tell your story."

The young men were unimpressed. "One of them shouted, "I've just lost my wife. I don't care if you die." But slowly the argument made its way and one, then two of them, agreed they had no reason to harm us, and convinced the others to let us go.

It was not the end of our troubles, as police had surrounded the region. We were arrested, interrogated and later expelled from the province, but not before signing a fully-fledged Chinese-style self-criticism for having broken the law by coming without permission. I was later summoned at the Foreign Ministry to be lectured along the same lines.

This was not to be the end of my contact with Henan's AIDS villages. I later connected with a courageous young NGO activist, a committed Buddhist, who was trying to help Henan AIDS orphans. He had set up a home for them in a town with a team of young Chinese volunteers. He invited me to visit but I only arrived to see police surround the house and close the orphanage because it didn't have the proper documents. Meanwhile, international pressure on China, particularly from then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, started having an impact. China recognised the existence of HIV/AIDS in the country, admitting that its puritan attitudes had not been fully

respected. When Chinese president Hu Jintao shook hands with an AIDS-patient during a visit to a hospital, it was the signal for doctors and volunteers across the country to act.

But this evolution didn't translate into action for the victims of the Henan blood scandal, in part because the officials who implemented the deadly trade were still influential and feared legal repercussions. They wanted immunity and the best way to guarantee it was to prevent outsiders from interfering, whether medical teams, NGOs or journalists.



In 2004, to my great surprise, I was approached by a Chinese friend to write a book about my experiences for a local publisher. I never expected that China would accept the words of a foreign journalist about one of its darkest corners. Had things changed so dramatically?

I first met with a young woman from the state-owned publishing house. She was very open – telling me I had to be discreet in the book about the way people were contaminated. The purpose of the book, she explained, was to raise sympathy and overcome stigma among the Chinese public for AIDS victims, particularly the orphans, and not to create political problems.

I reluctantly agreed, wanting to see how far we could go, but insisted I remain free to tell the whole story in a foreign edition of the book. To my great surprise, the answer was positive. "Not only do we allow you to do so, we encourage you," she said.

It became more exciting, but also more mysterious. Was I being manipulated? Or were there a few individuals more open than others in the Chinese system? The answer came a few weeks later, when I met with the CEO of the publishing company to finalise our agreement. We met in the very formal, very traditional setting of the private lounge of a famous Beijing teahouse. The woman who had been my contact gave a presentation about the project, and we discussed the details. I then turned to the CEO, who had remained silent, to ask his opinion. His answer was a shock to everyone, including his own employees. "China has its ways of dealing with issues," he said. "Some are still taboos. HIV/AIDS is one of them, and we have to respect taboos."

That was the end of the project. Everyone was angry, and we decided to go ahead with the book anyway, without a publisher. We had planned a final trip to Henan to do more research, and went ahead with it with the help of our Chinese NGO friends. For one week we worked underground in the heart of China, something I never expected would be possible in such a controlled state. During the day, we would hide in the anonymous life of a big city, and at night we drove some 60 or 70 miles to the AIDS villages.

The first night, we nervously parked about a mile from the village, and walked through cornfields. We passed the sleeping house of the village Committee, who had set up a group of vigilantes to prevent outsiders from coming, mainly journalists and NGOs, both foreign and Chinese. We walked silently to our first appointment, which had been organised by Chinese friends.

We went from house to house for hours, leaving just before dawn. We were witness to a most dramatic situation, with medical chaos making things even worse than the absence of treatment. The government had announced to the international community that it had started giving ARV drugs to Henan patients. What we saw, however, was a plan that was carried out with no ethics, no professionalism and no political will to help. We saw despair, we saw death, we saw frustration and anger.



We also met remarkable people, like Li Suzhi and her husband, Wang Guofeng. Both were HIV-positive, had lost their respective husband and wife, had children from their previous marriage, and became a couple during the course of their fight for justice and attention.

"WE WERE WITNESS TO A DRAMATIC SITUATION, WITH MEDICAL CHAOS MAKING THINGS EVEN WORSE THAN THE ABSENCE OF TREATMENT."

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Li Suzhi's story was heartbreaking. Her husband was a carpenter employed on construction sites in big cities. One day, years after selling his blood in the '90s, he became ill and doctors had difficulty with the diagnosis. He had heard about AIDS in the big cities and told his wife that he would kill himself if he had been contaminated.

He went to do some tests in a hospital, and his wife went to get the results: it was, indeed, AIDS. The doctors told her he only had a few weeks to live. To allow her husband to die peacefully without knowing he had been contaminated, she bribed them to give her a fake test result.

She later met Wang Guofeng while petitioning for the rights of the villagers; they were arrested and harassed together. When I met them, they were a powerful couple, feared and respected for giving coherent expression to the peasants' demand for justice.

A few weeks after we met, they called me in Beijing, telling me they were about to come to the capital. But they never made it. They were arrested on their way, taken to a special prison, deprived of their foreign-manufactured ARVs obtained through an NGO, and sentenced to a year of house arrest.

At the same time, I came across an internal report written by an extremely courageous Chinese doctor, Zhang Ke, of Beijing You'an Infectious Diseases Hospital. He had become involved in the Henan crisis in the late '90s, and was threatened with his life by the local authorities if he continued to put his nose in their business. But he continued, visiting Henan clandestinely numerous times, documenting the pandemic in a unique way, providing the only reliable data.

In his report given to China's central health authorities in January 2005, he gave his conclusions. He explained that the disaster could have been avoided if a few key conditions had been met.

If there had been no paid blood donation at that time; if the government had not appealed to the public to go for the paid blood donation; if the paid blood donations had been stopped in 1994, when HIV was first detected, and effective control and prevention measures had been taken at that time, if control and prevention measures had been taken in 1999 at the peak of the full-blown AIDS cases, if the rural public health system was comparatively complete; if they had acted immediately.

"None of the 'ifs' have been achieved today," he wrote, "and our disaster is still going on."

Based on his fieldwork, Dr Zhang went on to estimate that 300,000 lives would probably be lost in this disaster. The original document I had received back in 2001 had estimated the total number at one million, and Henan authorities have given the official figure of some 25,000 cases. Dr Zhang is the only one who provides some scientific work to support his claim.

He went on to say: "Nobody will be responsible for this disaster and nobody needs to be responsible for the disaster. The occurrence of a disaster has its objective historical background and historical inevitability, and our people have to gulp this cup of 'bitter wine' brewed by ourselves."

Dr Zhang, as a doctor, was ready to forget about responsibilities in order to get patients treated, and to put an end to unnecessary suffering. But ultimately there was no justice, and no end to the suffering.

Last year I received an ominous message from a health worker who had returned to the AIDS villages. "Not much has changed since you wrote your book," it said. The system was the winner. The blood scandal of Henan is only a footnote in China's massive, historical transformation. A shameful and deadly footnote.

Pierre Haski was *Libération*'s China Bureau Chief from 2000 to 2006, and in 2007 he co-founded the website Rue89 with other former journalists from the newspaper. His book, *China's Blood Trade*, is published by Grasset (Paris) and Susanna Lea Associates.

"BASED ON HIS FIELDWORK, DR ZHANG WENT ON TO ESTIMATE THAT 300,000 LIVES WOULD PROBABLY BE LOST IN THIS DISASTER."



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VAMPIRES WALK AMONG US. AND FLY AND TWIN AND WRIGGLE. BUT HOW DO THE REAL LIFE BLOODSUCKERS ACTUALLY DO IT? **WORDS BY JAMES BRAMBLE ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMILY ALSTON**



dr

Richard Lane opens a small Tupperware box and pulls out a dead bat. It looks pale and pathetic from its immersion in alcohol, but its black eyes, thorny teeth and strange crumpled nose – something like a small, fanged scrotum – are still enough to inspire caution. Lane lifts it up and spreads its bony wings.

"As you see, they are quite tiny, literally the size of a large house mouse with wings," he says. "If you look, you can see its teeth. They're like needles in the bottom of its lip. In this particular one, which is called *Desmodus*, they actually have a little cleft, a little gully for the blood."

This is a vampire bat, and Lane is Director of Science at the Natural History Museum, having previously been Head of Entomology – the study of insects. In particular, he has specialised in the 'vectors', or carriers, of disease – travelling extensively in the developing world to advise bodies such as the World Health Organisation.

"Nearly all vampire bats land near their host and then crawl up and make a small bite, which you can feel as a little nip, and also inject an anticoagulant with their saliva," he continues. "The blood they lap up with their little tongues, so I'm afraid there's no sucking out through the fangs. They literally lap it up like a cat with a bowl of milk."

There is something primal, atavistic, about the idea of animals that feed on blood. When Lane describes a friend who woke up on an expedition in Brazil to find the whole of his chest covered in blood ("It was almost definitely a vampire bat feeding on him in the middle of the night") you can imagine the frisson of fear and fascination that kept Bram Stoker up at night, pen in hand, imagination firing strange salvos onto the page.

Vampire bats are the most iconic ecto-parasites on earth, yet their link with the mythological vampire is only relatively recent – probably originating in the Victorian penny-dreadful *Varney the Vampire* by James Malcolm Rymer.

The vampire of English and German Gothic fiction popularised by Rymer, Stoker and Byron drew heavily on eastern European folklore, with its basis in real medieval torturers and tyrants. But more importantly, its success as a genre results from tapping deep into that unholy trinity in the primal backwater of our brains: of sex and blood, blood and death, death and sex. The vampire is a force of unfettered natural impulse – driven by an unsettling, preternatural hunger, both victimiser and victim of its own condition, blurring the distinction between dominance and submission.

While that cauldron of ambiguities and taboos had an obvious appeal to Victorian audiences, this fiction was also steeped in the Romanticists' rebellion against the forces of the Industrial Revolution: of unfettered reason and progress in the name of enlightenment. In this sense, at a time of intellectual certainties, the vampire offered reassuring fear and bewilderment at the opaque and overpowering force of the natural world.

The first recorded use of the word 'vampire' was a response to just such a natural phenomenon. The eighteenth-century epidemic of bubonic and bovine plague in southern and eastern Europe saw mysterious deaths followed by exhumations which revealed that the unfortunate occupants had regained consciousness and scratched at their coffins. Entrenched and morbid folklore, and the burgeoning and credulous trades of medicine, media and religion, quickly fed the hysteria.

One Peter Plogojowitz was said to have risen from the dead and killed up to 10 people in a small Hungarian village. He was described as a *vanpir*, and within three months a corrupted version, 'vampire', appeared in French and English newspapers for the first time. Vampires were soon the subject of serious discussion amongst doctors, clerics and philosophers.

Ironically, the key trigger of this hysteria – the plague – was indeed being spread by an insatiable bloodsucker, the rat flea, but this remained unrecognised until as late as 1898. Herein lies an interesting, if unsettling, allegory on the irrationality of human fear.

"It would be interesting to know whether people had a fear of bats before vampire stories," says Lane. "I think people have a fear of bats because they are extremely difficult to understand. They come out at night – that's got to be weird – they fly around like little mice with wings, and they make these funny noises. Is that why we are anxious about them? They don't bump into us, they don't get into our hair." Perhaps there are more rational reasons. After all, bats carry rabies. But as Lane points out, "We actually didn't know about that until very recently. So whether these are primeval fears, I don't know."

Lane's fascination with the natural world, and especially in the spread of disease, is in large part motivated by an interest in the points where nature and mankind meet. "Where you get tsetse flies, generally, you can't raise cattle. So the expansion of human beings using cattle in Africa is limited, not because tsetse flies are the problem but because of the parasite they transmit [which harbours sleeping sickness]," he explains. "The history of the evolution of human beings, the history of the evolution of different species as to where they can live, is determined by insects that suck blood, which I think is quite amazing."

But how exactly does it work? How are certain creatures able to live on nothing but blood? That, says Lane, is the miracle of evolutionary design. "It's quite complicated feeding on blood. While blood is a fantastic resource, it's actually quite dangerous to get hold of. The first obstacle is that they have to find a host. Now usually, but not always, they are feeding at night. So they use infrared detectors, which are unbelievably accurate, CO_2 receptors, water receptors and then a number of extremely sophisticated chemical receptors, which pick up the smell of the host. Different hosts smell of different things and we know that various organisms can pick them up from several kilometres away. You're looking at some extremely sophisticated engineering."

Evolution has generated many forms of ecto-parasitic behaviour and design. Some, such as the head louse and body louse, feed on only one host: humans. Others, such as the tsetse fly, feed on many. Somewhat disturbingly, the crab louse, or pubic louse, infects both humans and gorillas. Underwater parasites like lampreys suck on the blood of other fish while leeches feast on fish and mammals, including humans. In the Amazon river, the candiru has developed a legendary reputation by detecting urine in the water and attaching itself to the urethra of its, often human, victim.

This varied behaviour is the embodiment of Dawkins's 'selfish gene'. But as Dawkins himself points out, in the world of the endo-parasite, or internal parasite, where the survival of the organism is dependant on the survival of its host, cooperative behaviour can be essential. This close relationship with our own parasites has arguably been one of the keys to human survival. Recent studies have suggested that the rise in conditions such as asthma and stomach disorders may be a result of the fact that after thousands of years of benign co-existence, worms have been purged from our internal places. Reintroducing the hookworm and pig worm to our system would be like reintroducing an old and helpful friend.

For ecto-parasites, the issue of survival is driven by a more simple equation of supply and demand. "You don't sit on a tree branch and then saw off the branch from the rest of the tree," says Lane. "As hosts become scarce, so does the ability of the parasite to reproduce. It's almost like lions and gazelles. If lions are super-efficient and kill most of the gazelles, lions die of starvation. It's what we call a balance – but it's not actually a balance because it's fluctuating all the time. Occasionally parasites are over-efficient and kill off their host and go extinct. That is how evolution works. There is no guarantee that any evolutionary path is going to go anywhere."

So what of humans? If parasitism is such a beautiful method of survival, might a bit of bloodsucking be a good way of perpetuating the species in these difficult times? Blood is rich in fat and protein, although it lacks certain vitamins and minerals. Even so, could we go vampire and subsist on blood alone? "We could," agrees Lane. "People in East Africa live on blood. They breed their animals and live on the blood. The meat is kept as a currency, as your status in life. So you milk them and you bleed them. But," he warns, "it isn't exactly a balanced diet."

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it

takes a ... to produce a phen... be in on ... *In* has quietly been clean... at the Inte... ase have (at the time of go... movie of all ... sued up to select it in their pl... for the direc... ginning of the vampire genre.

Yet the ... with bringing John Ajvide Lindqv... screen ... been best kno... wedish homeland for directing "... ary idea of ge... according to ge... Alfredson such categorisation "is fu... Whether video ... this on the comedy or the drama shelf is up to them. I really d... involved in that d... It's very disturbing to have a headline above things. You don't h... din paintings ... [a sign telling you] wh... should feel when ... see them. At the same time, I can ... that the film is not ... this or that [with] ... I really like that when people get confused."



the ALC-HEMIST.

TOMAS ALFREDSON SPEAKS TO LWLIES ABOUT HIS IGNORANCE OF VAMPIRE FILMS, THE JOY OF PLAYING TRUANT, AND WHY THE INTERNET IS KILLING THE FILM INDUSTRY. WORDS BY MIKE BRETT

post-modern
ared Alfredson to be
on TV as a kid -- "I
and maybe that's one of the reasons why it's not that
ou can say that again. Convention is probably one of the
film in which the purest of puppy love blossoms between
his new neighbour – a timid pre-pubescent girl called Eli wh
man blood to keep her alive (well, undead). As our moral
ration for the poor wee homicidal mites we experience a curious
mainstream movies demand their audiences wear.
uppos wh n ou ry explor you w mind as a filmmaker and the things that make you scared I often
back to childhood " muses Alfredson. Today I m not so scared anymore " The director may have emerged
unscathed fr his years adolescent angst but his formative experiences have equipped him t
the power of childhood imagination. "I don t think that fear happens *dur ng* a scary thing," he ar ues
re or after it. For nstance f you n volved n a car accident, you wouldn't be scared at the time but you
get ared afterwards would get s ared imagining that y u might be involved n a crash r the
Your mind works very much n this way when you re small. Your imagination is very lively and your feelings
rtainly ase ch stronger wh y u g Laughter ouder a d deeper. All the
connected to strong feelings are stronger when you are at these ages." He pauses for a m re
noting, "Children become very vulnerable too of course. They make good victims in a dram

...ght be waiting in... ...that o... ...comments...
demons... ...or's acute ability to... ...his audi... ...evate to...
other film... ...d rather leave uncove... ...the hands-o... ...ific...
of school b... ...t have followed the fam... ...ing and righteous del...
had it not be... ...Alfredson's insistence that... ...motional truth he demand...
stories about b... ...g are about this sad boy. Fi... ...erson, who sits on his bed, cryin...
bearing his cross very bravely. The bullies hit him... ...and then finally he stands up and h...
back. I don't think that story is very true, really."

For Alfredson, *Let The Right One In* is instead... ...happens when psychological traum...
internalised to the point that it simply has to be ver... ...ge, or vampirism. "As I see it, Eli is t...
embodiment of his [Oskar's] anger. And how else could his anger b... ...mean, could his anger be beautiful? If yo...
harass somebody for long enough, what would his or her anger look like? If you beat someone for two years, an...
you w... t... look i... side that p... on... thoughts... ...se h... ...t her anger... ...would look... ...wful."

This repressed rage is in many ways the sourcebook for the world of *Let The Right One In*, a place where people on t... ...again... ...ciety have t... ...reate what Alfredson calls "parallel universes" just to survive. "I remember myself having hard times when I was 10 or 12 years-old," recalls the director. "I grew up in a family of five, and everybody was stressed... the morning. My parents went to work, my brother and sister went to school, and I played this game of pretending t... go... the statio... t... go to school, then waiting on the platform and going home again. Then I had this house of ours for five hours, which was my own little country, my own little land, where I could do whatever I wanted. Then I had t... re... t... reality by playing this game... lying about going to school. This parallel world w... so... othing and so quiet and so lonely. I suppose there are a lot of people in the film who have their own parallel universes that they have created for their own silence, as a way to have some peace and quiet, and to survive."

Survivalist introspection is certainly no stranger to the streets of Blackeberg... the walk-in freezer of suburbia that acts as the film's principle setting. ("Even though it looks very depressing – almost a caricature of Swedish gloom... kn... ol tru..." admits Alfredson.) Such... bleak backdrop... up the film... ...ulosity about the... ...ntal damage human beings inflict on themselves and others – not least through their unquenchable desire to settle in places that even Mother Nature seem... t... have given up for dead. "If we have a hard w...nter, you often ask yourself: 'How the hell could people come here in the first place? Why did they stay?'," says Alfredson. "This is crazy. Twenty degrees below zero, or more. It is incomprehensible. Everything to do with life is artificial: heat, food has to be imported, light is artificial. Everything that reminds you of life is artific... And there the people are, boxed in above and beside... another, in their respective silences."



As *Let The Right One In* continues to accumulate en... ...lterware to ward off a whole cohort... you... ...uld be f...rgiv... for thinking that the Swedish... ...y s... on... again, n... rude h... alth. Sadly, according to Alfredson, who is caustic in his attack on t... ...he believes are responsible for the slow st... ...tion of the country's fil... industry. "We're having som... really tough times in Sweden now because we are t... most computerised country in the world and everyone has a fancy computer and a broadband connection. We have very liberal downloading laws and people steal everything. This film was on the intern... one week after opening and that is... ...astrophe for us."

It the digital cloud has a silver lining it is as Alfredson acknowledges, its power to accelerate the... ...the geographical... ...t-alism that has ul... ...the film... dust... f... s... ...ng. "I think Hollywood... ...is not jus... a physical place," he argues. "It is becoming a global place too. Hollywood is producing... ...e and lot... European filmmakers are producing in Hollywood. It is like the name on an international fi... ...cing bank."

This creative (if not financial) decentralisation offers indigenous film industries a... ...hance to... new audiences. As Alfredson sees it: "The Swedish film industry now is really dr... ...of mon... trying t... be n... ...nt...rnat...n... It's su... ...r this i... ...m... ...nt wh... ...rybody... ...

And the future of motion pictures in this brave new digital world... I don't kno... televis...on came along... no one knew what was going t... happen. Everybody tends to... starts goin... ...different direct...on than it has done tradit...onally. I think we're in the... when m...ney takes new paths. It's very hard to imagine what is going t... happen with... music... dustry will show u... a little bit of what is going to happen be...ause they are five... ...", he adds. "Suddenly we have a m...llion rock stars on the internet but nobody has a big aud... ...backwards logi... to this. A... on... ca... b... ...ck-tal... but... ...h... nd... ...ry s...n... do... n... h...v... man... listen... ...don't kn...w if this will happen with the film industry, that films will shrink in proportion too."

Whatever the size of his next project, one thing is for certain: with the release of *Let The Right One In*, Tomas Alfredson has announced himself as a big, big talent.

"JAW-DROPPING, AWESOME...A STYLISH THRILL RIDE"
TIME OUT NEW YORK

"A TOUR DE FORCE FROM TOM HARDY"
★★★★
PHILLIP KEMP TOTAL FILM

"A CLOCKWORK ORANGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY"
★★★★
DAMIEN McSORLEY ZOO

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PETER TRAVIS, ROLLING STONE
★★★★
ROBBIE COLLIN NEWS OF THE WORLD

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ESQUIRE
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IN THE WORK OF RUSSIAN ARTIST VANIA ZOURAVLIOV, THE AESTHETIC OF J-HORROR MEETS THE ABSINTHE-INFUSED MADNESS OF EDGAR ALLEN POE, UNDERSCORED BY A DEEP WELL OF EROTIC FASCINATION. WHAT FOLLOWS IS A TRIP THROUGH A DARK AND DISTURBING IMAGINATION.





LWLIES: CAN YOU BRIEFLY TELL US HOW YOU GOT TO WHERE YOU ARE NOW?
Zoursvlov I began to draw from early childhood I came over to UK when I was a teenager and I started working as a freelance artist and photographer.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT FOR YOU IN YOUR ART CAREER?
A monograph of my work was published last autumn and that was a very special occasion for me I've had books with my drawings and photographs published before but this was the first time I had to look at my back catalogue of work and make a selection I found this experience both satisfying and melancholic.

YOUR WORK IS FILLED WITH MACABRE SYMBOLISM WHERE DO THESE MOTIFS COME FROM AND WHAT DO THEY MEAN?
For me there are several elements in what you describe as macabre symbolism I think that when it comes to art and culture, our understanding of what is macabre or dark is often subjective and circumstantional In my work I sometimes refer to ideas from various art movements such as Romanticism or German Renaissance At other times I explore themes such as mortality, destruction of beauty and the transient nature of life

THERE'S A TIMELESS QUALITY TO YOUR DRAWINGS WHICH EVOKES THE WORK OF OLD MASTERS. WHAT RELEVANCE DO THEY HAVE TO YOUR WORK AND WHICH MODERN DAY ARTISTS INSPIRE YOU?
In terms of inspiration, whether something is old or new is of no importance to me all that matters is how it resonates with my mood or ideas. I love the sense of timelessness that I get when I look at old paintings or photographs They show me that people and their desires hardly changed throughout the centuries There is also an almost mystical quality to great works of art They transcend the personalities of their creators and the time of their creation When it comes to contemporary art, I am very interested in the work of Chinese painters Ai Xuan Wang Yi Guang Wei Dong and Feng Zhengjie

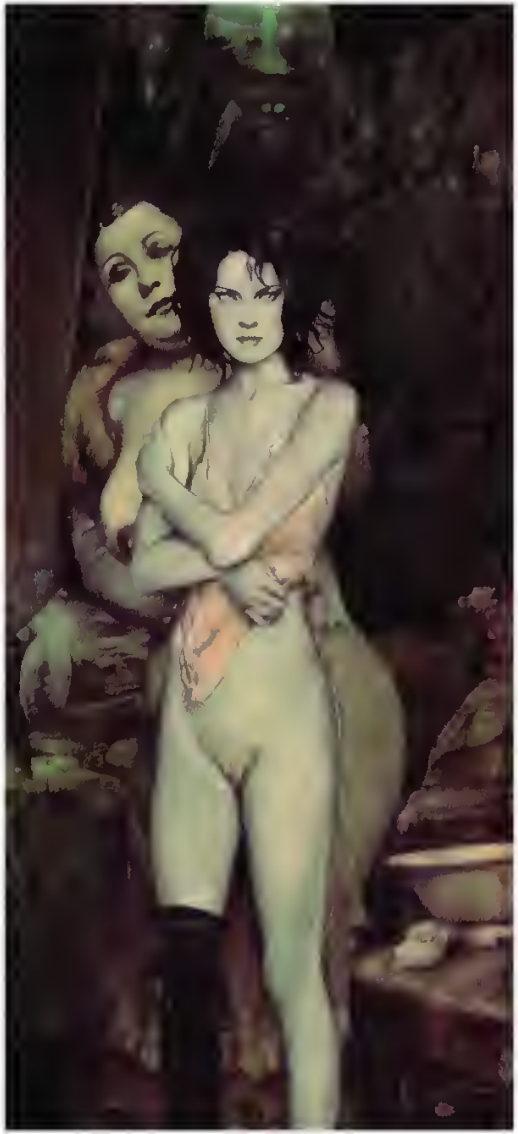
IF YOU COULD ONLY LOOK AT ONE PIECE OF ART FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE, WHAT WOULD IT BE AND WHY?
Although initially this scenario sounds like a form of torture to me, the more I think about it, the more I can visualise living next to just one piece of art It would have to be 'The Savior' by Andrei Rublev or 'Madonna Litta' by Leonardo They both are sublime

SPECIFICALLY, WHAT FILMS, DIRECTORS OR FILM GENRES INSPIRE YOU?
I am much more into films rather than directors or genres Some of my favorite films are *Rashomon*, *Kaidan*, *Belle de Jour*, *Kuroneko*, *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, *La Reine Margot*, *Den en Ni Shisu* and *Days of Being Wild* I also love many '70s British and Soviet films

All images by Vania Zouravliov at Big Active.
Previous page ***Fursitn der Finstemis*** (2007) Yasa magazine This page left to right ***Demonism*** (2005) personal work ***Matt Elliott 'Drinking Songs'*** (2006) Ici d'ailleurs ***Vincent Oliver 'EP1'*** (2006) Lo Recordings







Left to right ***Owls*** (2005) personal work
Twist (2007) personal work, ***Toys*** (2007) personal work







Cronos (1993)
Available now on DVD from
Momentum Home Entertainment

THE UN-DEAD GENRE

FROM AFFLICTION TO ADDICTION, LAWRENCE PEARCE, WRITER AND DIRECTOR OF CULT VAMPIRE MOVIE [illegible], SINKS HIS TEETH INTO THE LANDMARK FILMS OF AN EVER-EVOLVING GENRE, AND CONSIDERS WHY IT CONTINUES TO REMAIN RELEVANT FOR MODERN AUDIENCES.

the vampire film has long been a staple for dedicated fans of the horror genre, but over the past decade there has been a notable resurgence in the number of fangs and fear movies being released, both in mainstream cinema and on the independent circuit.

The earliest cinematic vampires were supernatural monsters. Landmark feature *Nosferatu* (1922), a German outing for Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, portrayed the vampire as demonic, shadowy and particularly creepy in an unlicensed version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which was ultimately sued by Stoker's estate and not seen again until 1994 when surviving prints were restored. In 1931, Bela Lugosi starred as the Count for the first time in Universal's *Dracula*, a portrayal of the vampire that struck a nerve so profoundly in its masochistic audience that it spawned a successful sub-genre of Dracula movies, all released by the same studio. This seminal vampire film also etched into our minds an image of evil dressed in a black cloak, floating through shadows, hissing and baring fangs before draining his victims of blood and innocence.

Fast-forward to contemporary cinema and the mythical vampire now takes many different shapes, as it has become an iconic figure representing the ills, fears and taboos of modern society.

Before breathing new life into gun-wielding daywalkers' in *Blade II* (2002), Guillermo del Toro first explored the world of the vampire in 1993's *Cronos*. Over a decade later he would explain that his feature debut was "a story in which a young girl gives her grandfather a vampire as a pet". Mixing a refreshing yet uniquely surreal take on the genre with an allegory about US/Mexican relations, *Cronos* also delves into themes of mortality and addiction. Antiques dealer Jesus Gris ('Grey Jesus' played by Federico Luppi) discovers an ancient mechanical beetle while looking after his granddaughter. Unbeknownst to him, the device holds prisoner a real immortal beetle inside its casing that, in return for the host's blood, will grant eternal life.

By the time Angel (Ron Perlman) – the American nephew of a Howard Hughes-style recluse greedy for immortality – pays Jesus a visit, the beetle has already captured its host like a dealer snagging a new junkie. "The only true mortal character in the film is the daughter, who does not care about time and is immune to the concept of death," explained del Toro. As the beetle draws blood and gives life, Jesus finds himself addicted to blood himself and degrades in front of our very eyes, losing the life he once loved for a longing that is never fulfilled. "By the same token," del Toro continued, "I wanted to show a vampiric chain that went all the way to the insect locked within the device. It is locked there like a living filter and is at the same time the master and the slave."

With *Cronos*, del Toro paints the undead as both casualty and killer. "The ultimate vampire and the ultimate victim." The vampire in his world is not only an addict of immortality, power and hunger; he is also a reluctant figure of sadness, loss and loneliness. This separates him from the classic monster out to seduce and deflower young virgins, waging war on all that is good and pure.

It's an increasingly common depiction in the modern vampire movie: the blood addict as lead protagonist and not just a supernatural villain. The nightwalker is the suffering anti-hero, a tragic figure on a downward spiral unable to resist his urges, and becoming a prisoner of his own nature.

Tomas Alfredson's *Let The Right One In* (2008) is the perfect example. Essentially a tragic romance, once again the vampire, Eli, is a victim of her own affliction. It also touches on issues dealing with bullying, drugs, theft and murder, with the loss of innocence powerfully depicted through the child characters. Eli feeds off others both literally and metaphorically, yet she offers Oskar a new life – and without demanding a price paid in blood.

In the hugely influential Kathryn Bigelow movie, *Near Dark* (1987), Adrian Pasdar plays Caleb, an everyman who is seduced by a strange girl, Mae (Jenny Wright). Disguised as a love bite, Mae nips Caleb's neck and then runs off, leaving him to descend into shivers and sweats over the next 24 hours. His symptoms are those of a drug addict but, without understanding the cause, Caleb is left to die until Mae and her band of nightwalkers return to welcome him into the fold. Realising his fate, Caleb reluctantly joins the blood-feeding activities of the group but refuses to kill, opting instead to survive off Mae's blood until he is forced to decide between his real family and his new friends.

Near Dark represented a new slant on the genre, a take that presented vampires forced by their urges to carry out deviant acts, shun their families, living just to get their fix. It has influenced countless movies since, inspiring an influx of creative talent and a rise in the number of movies being made. Vampire films became a platform to explore a tragic disease (this in the midst of an AIDS epidemic), grounded in the bleak realities of modern society. Even in mainstream affairs like the *Blade* franchise, with its extremes of action, plot and character, the lead hero is a reluctant vampire carrying the weight of dependency and the desire for redemption on his broad shoulders.

More recently, *Twilight* (2008), directed by Catherine Hardwicke, has taken the young demographic by storm, exploring the world of the vampire through rose-tinted teenage sunglasses. But even with its tween romance, the film touches on the sexual frustration that accompanies adolescence. Adapted from the novel by Stephanie Meyer, *Twilight* contrasts human frailties with an almost glamorous view of the darker, supernatural side of vampirism, identifying that mysterious, sinister quality that defines the vampire dynamic and the danger that attracts us. But all the while Edward (Robert Pattinson) is vulnerable and misunderstood. The dilemmas explored tap into that now-familiar portrayal of the vampire as sufferer, laden with guilt and primal urges that he/she struggles to fight.

Which brings us to *Night Junkies* (2007), a small indie feature focusing on Vincent (Giles Alderson), a lonely, reclusive figure who, having been 'turned' by a lady of the night, spends his time feeding his new addiction like an addict prowling the streets for a score. He is good-hearted despite the affliction, and falls in love with a stripper named Ruby (Kaba Winter), who runs away from the safety of the club where she works (there is a Jack the Ripper-style killer wandering the streets) in a bid to escape the ruthless owner's attempts to push her into 'the game' and his psychotic right-hand-man's obsessive advances. After a night of passion, Vincent is unable to resist his need for blood and feeds off Ruby. However, without killing her, he has turned her into an addict as well and, when Ruby's body is crying out for something she cannot understand, she returns to the source.

Vincent and Ruby fall further in love, bonding over their loneliness and questions of morality. When Ruby refuses to live the life of a junkie and decides to go cold turkey on the blood, Vincent kills the lecherous Maxi as the couple attempt to make a new life. Maxi's right-hand-man (never named) tracks them down, leading to a bloody finale where he is revealed to be the vampire serial killer on the streets, and Ruby gives her life to allow an injured Vincent to feed one last time and save his own.

It is a tragic love story, doomed from the beginning, filled with characters that are all missing something – every character is 'feeding' off someone else. Like del Toro's *Cronos*, the intention was to show a vampiric chain running through all the characters.



The reason behind making a modern vampire movie is to explore how, as a society, we are all vampires to some extent, and the more destructive ones are merely the ones we let in the most. Indeed, in *Let The Right One In*, the title refers to vampire lore, which states that the vampire can only enter your house if you invite him in, placing a portion of the blame on the victims themselves.

In *Night Junkies*, the only character who refuses to become a parasite is Ruby, who insists on fighting her addiction. Vincent, while a sympathetic and well-meaning character who lives by his own skewed moral code when picking his victims, still feeds off the blood of others. Maxi feeds off his strip club, where the money flows like blood through his veins, and the girls being coerced into giving themselves up for the clients are his victims. Even before the right hand man is revealed to be the killer, he is clearly parasitic in his obsessive love for Ruby as he leers over her in a dressing room, begging threateningly for her to love him and only him.

Though spending most of its time at the eye level of these characters, the film also views the bigger picture, accusing the drug industry and the illegal sex trade of also being vampiric, sucking the life out of all involved. Here, the pusher is both master and slave to the addict, much like the beetle in *Cronos* is master and slave to Jesus.

This reflection of society is perhaps the source of the recent resurgence in the number of vampire movies, from mainstream to indie, in recent years. The vampire movie once held a mirror to our fear of the supernatural and religious deviance but, as religion has waned in its influence, so the genre has had to evolve. The vampire movie was also a source of exploring sexual repression but, as we are becoming more and more liberal sexually, this has also waned as a theme.

Now, the relevance the vampire movie has for us as an audience is to hold up a mirror to society's parasitical nature, forcing us to see and understand how, in every level of our world, we feed off others in one form or another. And yet by offering redemption to these dark characters that fill the modern vampire film, the audience – and society in general – is offered the same redemption. As long as we are able to look at ourselves in this unveiled way, the genre will continue to thrive.



Twilight (2008)

the ordinary boy

HOW DID A FORMER MAGICIAN, STAND-UP COMEDIAN AND HARDCORE MORRISSEY FAN CHANGE THE SHAPE OF THE HORROR GENRE? ONLY JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST HAS THE ANSWERS.

WORDS BY MATT BOCHENSKI

John Ajvide Lindqvist isn't at all what you expect. This is the guy who writes about young kids with their feet knocked out (it's easier to give blowjobs to paying paedos) and a horny, half-melted zombie whose only distinguishing feature is an erection. *Weird* shit. You ought to be able to tell, you know? Pick up the vibe, a little aura of oddness. But Lindqvist is considered, intelligent, even phlegmatic. His conversation is punctuated by sighs and pauses – the occasional disconcerting laugh. He sounds... sane. Maybe that's the weirdest thing of all.

Lindqvist has quietly set about reinventing the horror genre. As a kid, he read every book in the 'Cold Shivers' series, over a hundred, from classics like *The Incredible Shrinking Man* to the worst kind of bargain basement trash. He snuck into cinemas – *The Fog*, *Halloween 2*, *Death Valley*. He absorbed the clichés of James Herbert and Stephen King – the blood and guts, the gore and grime – but then he threw it all out and started again.

The result was *Let The Right One In*, a vampire novel that substituted Gothic castles, counts and coffins for the cold hard streets of a Swedish suburb. This was a very real, very ugly world of drugs, alcohol and sexual abuse – no real fiction at all. "I tried to portray what it felt like at that time when I was 13-years-old," says Lindqvist today, "and that was a lot darker and a lot colder."

This is the horror genre re-imagined in Lindqvist's own image: set in his home town of Blackeberg, in the apartment where he grew up, in the school where he suffered experiences "quite similar" to those that Oskar – the young bullied boy whose life is changed by his love for Eli, a vampire – survives.

It's an extraordinary novel whose power comes from its ordinary setting. It's as much a story about the waking dead of Sweden's social underclass as the undead of vampire mythology. Though the love story between Oskar and Eli is written with great warmth and sentiment, look closely and there's a vein of cynicism in some of the book's more political passages. The alcoholic, Lacke, bitterly complains that towns like Blackeberg were designed to be perfect, but something was wrong with the rulers, the angles.

"A lot of people in Sweden look to this time, 20 or 25 years ago, as a sort of golden age," says Lindqvist. "It wasn't, obviously." This was the era when the right-wing gained power for the first time in 40 years and the welfare safety net started to fray. According to Lindqvist, the west of Stockholm became a major drug centre. "Everyone in school had an older brother who was involved in it," he recalls. "They were the tough guys."

In the usual narrative, Lindqvist would have survived this world through his writing – using words as a weapon to keep the dark side at bay. But that would be too neat, too clichéd. Lindqvist took an altogether more winding road to success. In his teenage years, his relationship with the horror genre dwindled. He worked as a street magician in Stockholm, then a stand-up comedian. He wrote for other, more famous performers and even tried his hand as a playwright, unsuccessfully. Eventually he started to hit the skids. "I didn't have enough commissions to write for other comedians, my own career in the scene was almost finished because I wasn't getting any bookings and the theatre pieces weren't very good," he admits.

Almost on a whim, he decided to write a short story, just to see if he could. "Somehow it had never occurred to me that I could write a horror story," he says, but he sat down, gave it a go, and the result was *Our Skin, Our Blood, Our Bones*. Named after the lyrics from Morrissey's 'There's A Place In Hell For Me and My Friends' (just as *Let The Right One In* is a title taken from Morrissey's 'Let The Right One Slip In'), this 20-page short was a zombie story set on a small Swedish island. "It wasn't really very good writing," explains Lindqvist, "but it was a really exciting story. So I thought, 'Yeah, I know this. I know how to do this – to create excitement through scares'."

The public agreed. *Let The Right One In* was an instant success, and it wasn't long before the production companies came sniffing for the film rights. Only when Lindqvist met Tomas Alfredson, however, did he feel he'd found somebody who really understood what his story was about. "I felt that he was one of the few directors, especially in Sweden, who works in the same vein as I do, which, I feel, is trying somehow to be very melodramatic but not tipping over that edge where it becomes ridiculous," he explains. "Tomas was someone I could relate to – who understood what I was saying. We didn't have a language barrier between us."

One barrier did exist, however: a little matter of taste and decency. No matter how much Alfredson 'got' Lindqvist, no matter their shared passion for telling this tale as a love story not a horror story, there was no avoiding the fact that the novel was going to have to undergo some fairly significant changes if it was going to make it to the screen. Film censors aren't known for their permissive attitude towards child prostitution and kids climbing into bed with each other.

It's the kind of thing that drives most writers to despair, or at least to a studied, defensive indifference, but Lindqvist embraced the process of adaptation. "I'm very pragmatic," he says. "Although I should be the one who's sensitive about it, I tell people, 'This is a movie. This is a different thing. We can't rely on the old story – this is the movie script; let's concentrate on that.' I learned that this is the only way to approach it," he continues. "I couldn't possibly be sentimental about the book because then I wouldn't be working as a scriptwriter, I would just be a pain in the ass for people trying to make the movie."

Working alongside Alfredson and an independent script consultant, Lindqvist began to make his novel look and feel more like a film. The role of one of the characters, Håkan, was significantly reduced, not just because his behaviour was too extreme for cinema, but also because, in terms of the narrative, it was complicating the threat to Eli, diverting the audience's attention from the growing conflict between the vampire and Lacke.

Other cuts, however, feel more significant. Oskar's 'piss ball', a device he invents to deal with the fact that he wets himself, is nowhere to be seen. And yet this is crucial to our understanding of Oskar – it reveals the depths of humiliation from which Eli rescues him, but also the capacity for quiet determination which, in turn, will save Eli's life. As it happens, the piss ball made it into an early cut, but it didn't survive the test screenings. "Nobody really understood what this was that he was fiddling with," Lindqvist reveals. "It was difficult to put it into imagery without explaining what it is, so it had to go."

So too did one of the book's most dramatic scenes, when the locked door to Eli's bathroom is finally opened and she's revealed, sleeping, in a bath of blood. This is the moment when Lacke can no longer deny the evidence of his own eyes – when he's finally forced to admit that he's facing the unthinkable, the unbelievable: a vampire. In the film, the blood is gone, replaced by dirty blankets, but Lindqvist has another good explanation: "This was completely my own decision," he says, unapologetic. "I simply felt that this somehow belonged in another film – this was more *The Grudge*. It would pose too many questions about how is this possible. Without explaining it, it seemed too much like just trying to strive for an effect, so I decided to remove it."

Speaking of 'another film', even before *Let The Right One In* receives most of its international premieres, work is already starting on the Hollywood remake. *Cloverfield*'s Matt Reeves is slated to direct, a decision that Lindqvist says he's happy with. Beyond that, he doesn't have much else to add. Though it's hard, no, impossible to see any of his book's subtext making it to American screens, he refuses to take too much of an interest. It's seven years since Lindqvist first brought Eli to life – "I'm really through with this story," he says.

There are other novels, and more adaptations, to focus on. Lindqvist's second book, *Handling The Undead*, is currently being translated for release in the UK later this year. Just as *Let The Right One In* took the vampire genre by the throat, *Handling The Undead* radically exposes the old clichés of zombie horror. It sees thousands of corpses come back to life in Sweden's morgues, but rather than ushering in a George Romero-style apocalypse, the undead simply want to go home. Once again, this is a novel about family and society as much as guts and gore.

But now that Lindqvist is hot property, can he continue to stay true to his roots, or will the pull of movie money make his writing more commercial? The author, of course, is adamant that he hasn't changed, arguing that his style has always been 'filmic' "because I describe scenes rather than delving into language. Some people write like this. When I read a Stephen King story – and I don't really read him much anymore – it's like you have a film running in your head because the images are described in such a way that they are conveyed to you visually on the page also." Nevertheless, he says, with a note of defiance, his next novel, a story rich in Swedish pop culture, will be 'unfilmable', although he thought the same thing about *Handling The Undead*, and now he's working on the script with Alfredson.

At least he's no longer carrying the burden of being Sweden's sole international literary sensation. Stieg Larsson has posthumously emerged as one of the world's best-selling authors with his 'Millennium Trilogy', the first part of which, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, was a murder mystery that oscillated between the financial and media centre of Stockholm, and the frozen countryside of the north. Larsson, a noted anti-fascist campaigner, handed in the manuscript mere months before his mysterious death. Last year, he sold more books than JK Rowling.

Inevitably, some people will lump Lindqvist and Larsson together as a sort of 'New Swedish Literature'. They share a taste for the sexually shocking and the pacing of old-fashioned page-turners. But the comparisons don't extend much further. "I can't really feel that we're part of anything together," says Lindqvist, adding guiltily, "I feel like the lucky one: he's successful, but I'm alive."

Alive and on his own. *Let The Right One In* defies categorisation; it defies being seen as part of any kind of collective. Like Lindqvist himself, it's unique, a one-off, heading in directions that other people haven't even considered, never mind dared to tread. And remember: that was his first book. A beginning. The mind boggles at where it'll end.

Un Certain Regard
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2008

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WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER?

IMMORTALITY IS AT THE SEDUCTIVE HEART OF VAMPIRE MYTHOLOGY. BUT AS SCIENCE ACCELERATES, YOU WON'T NEED TO OFFER YOURSELF TO THE UNDEAD TO BE ABLE TO LIVE FOREVER. LWLIES HAS TRACKED DOWN THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE GAME OF LIFE TO UNCOVER THE FASCINATING STORY OF HOW WE'LL ALL SOON BE DEFEATING DEATH.

Every culture has attempted to conquer death, from the cycles of reincarnation favoured by Hinduism and Buddhism to the alchemical fervour of early China. England, for its part, can not only boast Isaac Newton's long, strange mid-career pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone, but also considers itself the resting place of the Holy Grail – the cup of Christ that bestows eternal life.

Our fascination with the vampires of James Malcolm Rymer, Bram Stoker or Anne Rice can be explained, at least in part, on their seductive promise of immortality. Not only do these creatures live forever, they live forever young, frozen, flawless. The world is their oyster, time their plaything. Who wouldn't sacrifice their humanity to the vampire's bloodlust if the pay off is an eternity of indolent, erotic pleasure?

But in the absence of the undead, we're going to have to find another way to satisfy our craving for everlasting life. And that is where an ever-increasing number of scientists are keen to step in.

Modern science has yet to agree on what makes us age. Our bodies are pre-programmed to grow and repair themselves – so why – to borrow a phrase from what is already the long-distant twentieth century – do we come with an in-built obsolescence fitted as standard? The nineteenth-century theory was that once we had procreated we withered and died to make way for the next generation. It implies that evolution has some form of intelligent hand at the tiller, and that – though it may remain a comforting thought – is patently not the case.

Today there are a handful of competing theories as to why we age and die. None of them prove entirely satisfactory, but advances in gene manipulation, biotechnology and computational power could mean that in the future – which, in case you didn't know, will be arriving much sooner than you think – we might not even need to understand our mortality in order to defy it.

"MY WORK IS NO MORE A 'THEORY' THAN THE WRIGHT BROTHERS' DESIGN FOR A PLANE WAS A 'THEORY'."

THE NEXT ICE AGE.

it s nothing that's going to happen overnight, of course, but there exists a quietly growing community of ardent believers prepared to go to extreme (though they might argue quite sensible) lengths in order to stick around long enough for technological advances to permit them to achieve something like immortality

Cryonics (as opposed to cryogenics, which is the study of how matter behaves at extremely low temperatures) is a burgeoning industry that offers its clients unlimited time in the cooler while they wait for the exponentially accelerating forefront of science to catch up with their hopes and dreams of everlasting life Running at around $100,000 for the full package, it s abundantly clear that this treatment isn t entirely the preserve of crackpots and high-minded hobbyists

Far from serving as a dead-letter office for the soul, cryopreservation and the more common practice of neuropreservation – which freezes only the brain in the assumption that by the time the technology exists to revivify frozen grey matter the regeneration of a new body will be mere bagatelle – offer an entirely viable form of life extension

The premise of cryonics is that the memories and personality of a being are stored within the cellular structure of its brain Freezing the brain, utilising a combination of cryoprotectants to combat the formation of damaging ice crystals, captures the subject in the precise state in which they entered stasis The snag – and there's always a snag – is that cryopreservation is not reversible by current scientific methods How far off it remains is not clear "Fifty to a hundred years for people currently being cryopreserved," estimates Ben Best, CEO of the Cryonics Institute, "and perhaps as little as 30 years for those subjects of cryopreservation technologies that do not yet exist "

The Cryonics Institute was incorporated in 1976..not amid the freak-flag flyin' flakes of Southern California or the log-cabin liberals of Aspen, but just outside the blue-collar Motown grime of Detroit, Michigan It's just one of a handful of organisations currently offering a chilled slice of postponed forevverhood

Controversial English gerontologist Aubrey de Grey explains further "Cryonics is a very important area of biomedical research that will save enormous numbers of lives as soon as people start to realise that cryonics patients are only legally dead, not necessarily biologically dead Once you realise that, cryopreservation is just a natural extension of the medically-induced comas that are done in hospitals every day to improve the chances of recovery from an operation."

But while cryonics offers temporary sanctuary from the march of time, research into eliminating the causes of ageing itself continues apace

SPLINTER CELL.

De Grey is author of the book *Ending Aging*, and co-founder of the Methuselah Foundation, a non-profit medical charity with no less a mission statement than caging the subtle thief of youth himself They are working towards this end by promoting a programme of running repairs to take place within the body at the cellular level When asked about his 'theories', De Grey doesn t hesitate to correct the line of questioning "My work doesn't involve creating theories – theories are explanations for how nature works What I create are technological proposals for manipulating nature, specifically for manipulating ageing My work is no more a 'theory' than the Wright brothers design for a plane was a 'theory "

That out of the way, he goes on to outline the aforementioned proposals "Ageing is essentially the same in the human body as it is in a simple, man-made machine: various types of damage accumulate as intrinsic side effects of normal operation For a long time there is no consequence for the overall functioning of the machine, but eventually it declines and finally fails completely In the case of the human body the maintenance will mainly involve replacing lost cells, eliminating unwanted cells, removing molecular garbage and breaking unwanted chemical bonds "

It has long been believed that there are only a finite amount of times that our cells can divide This results in their decreased ability to replenish themselves, our bodies failing us in old age It is a phenomenon known as the Hayflick limit Does de Grey foresee any way to break through the glass ceiling that it imposes? "Certainly – insofar as it's an obstacle at all We can overcome the Hayflick limit if and when we need to by introducing cells to replace the ones that have stopped working "

The idea is that if our DNA can be reprogrammed to permanently stave off disease and degeneration then our bodies can go on working indefinitely But as Dr Steven Gane of the London Centre of Nanotechnology is quick to point out, this does not guarantee copper-bottomed immortality, rather, "It is merely not dying from old age, not the complete inability to die at all After all, car crashes will still be fatal."

But like de Grey, Gane sees no practical obstacle to the deployment of his particular branch of science in the battle against the causes of cell degeneration and ageing "Nanotechnology is the science of the very small, the realm of weird quantum effects that underlie our ordinary world We know that the 'blind watchmaker' of evolution has made countless extremely intricate atomic-scale machines capable of building bone and jelly, brain and brawn, and hope we may be able to do the same Nanotechnology is the closest we will come to replicating, and exceeding, the miracles of nature "

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"WE'LL HAVE THE HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE TO RECREATE HUMAN INTELLIGENCE BY THE END OF THE 2020s."

THE GHOSTS AND THE MACHINE.

If keeping our bodies in perfect working order in perpetuity can't fully realise our quest for true immortality, then – in the future as envisaged by the likes of Dr Anders Sandberg of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University – we might be well advised to slough off our fusty biological overcoats and simply go digital. "The idea," he explains of the institute's research, "is to scan a brain in such detail as to get both its tissue structure and chemical properties and then compile the images into 3D volumes where software finds the connectivity and estimates cell properties. We would ultimately put these into a neural network simulator and run it."

It might sound a little far-fetched, perhaps even ludicrous, and there are many, such as noted neuroscientist Professor Susan Greenfield, who not only doubt its likelihood but also question its validity. Proponents of such 'mind uploading' remind us, however, that mapping the human genome was very recently considered an impossible undertaking, only to be completed a mere 12 years after the inception of the Human Genome Project. Dr Sandberg even-handedly addresses both of these points when he says, "There is a difference between having a map and understanding it. It, for instance, you gave me a circuit diagram of a computer processor I might be able to understand how each little part works, but have no clue what the whole system is intended to do."

Such well-intentioned concerns have rarely derailed mankind's innate desire to barrel on regardless when it comes to refining every technological innovation from fire to the firewall. As Ray Kurzweil relates, we are already well on a like-it-or-not course toward the birth of High Street neurotechnology. "IBM is already creating a simulation of about 10,000 cortical neurons, which includes tens of millions of connections," he says. "The first version of this process will simulate electrical activity, and future versions will also simulate the relevant chemical activity."

Kurzweil is perhaps the only man with a demonstrable claim to the awkward but increasingly relevant title of 'futurist'. An inventor and businessman, the recipient of dozens of awards and Honorary Doctorates, and the author of a remarkable series of books on futurism, technology and artificial intelligence, his predictions have a staggering hit-rate.

"Humans need about 10 quadrillion [10^{16}] calculations per second [CPS] to provide functions to all the regions of the brain," he explains. "Some supercomputers are already at 100 trillion [10^{14}] CPS, and will hit 10^{15} CPS around the end of this decade. Several with one quadrillion CPS are already on the drawing board, and two Japanese efforts are targeting 10 quadrillion CPS by the end of the decade. By 2020, 10 quadrillion CPS will be available for around $1,000."

That's a computer with all the cumulative processes of a human brain for the price of a holiday. With the advances in neural mapping and the law of accelerating returns that Kurzweil believes are driving up computational power at an ever-increasing rate, we will soon have access to the rudimentary tools with which to carve out true immortality.

"We'll have both the hardware and software to recreate human intelligence by the end of the 2020s," he predicts. "We'll be able to improve these methods and harness the speed, memory capabilities and knowledge-sharing ability of machines. We can then back up the information. Using nanotechnology-based manufacturing, we could recreate your brain, or better yet reinstantiate it in a more capable computing substrate."

This process, believes Simon Garn, will "likely produce the same kind of behaviour as the real brain. Whether it would be independently conscious or the same person as the original brain depends much on your particular philosophical views. I think we have to do it to see how it turns out."

Whether the gift of immortal life would, however, turn out to be a curse is a subject that has long been considered by the finest minds. In his 1755 essay *Of the Immortality of the Soul*, Scottish philosopher David Hume suggested that without the terror of death mankind would not have evolved at all. In the nineteenth century, the hero of Mary Shelley's eerie short story *The Mortal Immortal* finds that unyielding life leaves him "... alone, and weary of myself – desirous of death, yet never dying."

Even as far back as the fifth century BC, the Greek lyric poet Pindar chastened himself to "Strive not, my soul, for an immortal life, but make the most of what is possible." Tomorrow – or someday so like it that it makes no odds – the eternal optimist in Kurzweil expects the everyday and the infinite to fold into each other. "In my view, death is a tragedy," he says with the conviction of a staunch humanist. "It's a tremendous loss of personality, skills, knowledge, relationships. We've rationalised it as a good thing because that's really been the only alternative we've had. But disease, ageing, and death are problems we are now in a position to overcome."

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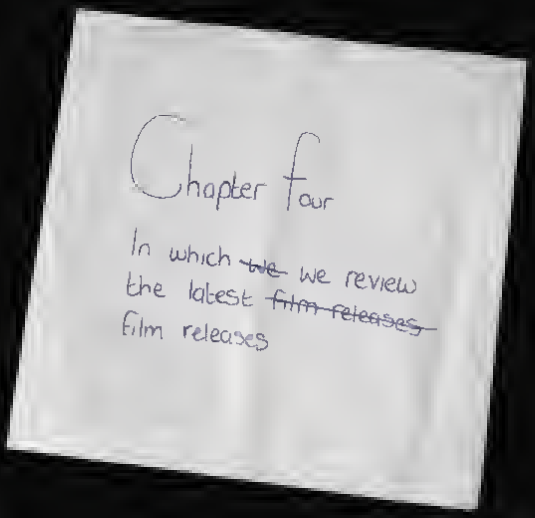
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OPENS IN CINEMAS MARCH 6

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WATCHMEN

trailer

DIRECTED BY Zack Snyder
STARRING Patrick Wilson, Billy Crudup, Jackie Earle Haley

Not just one of the most anticipated films of the year, but of the last quarter of a century The greatest graphic novel ever written. The one that Terry Gilliam David Hayter, Darren Aronofsky and Paul Greengrass all failed to adapt for the big screen. The one they said no one could. That's a lot of weight for a film to shoulder All of which makes 300 director Zack Snyder's *Watchmen* even more impressive. It's stylish, adult and very, very faithful.

How do you introduce superheroes no one has ever heard of? Who don't have superpowers? Who are just damaged men and women who dress up in funny costumes? How do you explain that a luminous blue demi-god helped Nixon win the Vietnam war and stay on as US president? That a new generation of masked vigilantes have been outlawed and someone is murdering them?

Snyder does it all in one brilliant stroke. Scored to Bob Dylan's 'The Times They Are a Changin'', the stunning opening credits montage glides us through a startling new vision of the twentieth century. Gaudily dressed men arresting bank robbers. JFK picked off by a grinning cigar-chomper behind the grassy knoll. An astronaut standing on a lunar surface with a giant blue figure reflected in his visor. Those former vigilante heroes being dragged into retirement, asylums or the morgue.

From there on in, even at two hours and 40 minutes, *Watchmen* never slows down for a second. Actually, that's not true. It slows down a lot. Whether it's superhero sex or sequences of brutal, bone-snapping violence. Snyder loves to lean on the slo-mo, savouring and stylising the action at every beat. Take the scene where retired crime-fighters Nite Owl II (Patrick Wilson) and Silk Spectre II (Malin Akerman) batter a gang of alley thugs' faces crumple, bones burst through flesh and blood spatters. Get used to it. Bullets in brains, arms sheed off with a buzz saw, splatty eviscerations... *X-Men: The Last Stand*, this ain't.

Concussive as they are, Snyder's chop-socky fight sequences are as theatrical as the rest of his film. From Nixon's prosthetic nose-job to the rain-soaked synthetic backdrops, Snyder never allows us to forget he's making a comic book adaptation. Then again, no comic-book has a soundtrack as incredible as this. Nat King Cole's 'Unforgettable', Nena's '99 Luftballoons', Hendrix's 'All Along The Watchtower'. And truth is, *Watchmen* shouldn't feel like a comic book superhero flick. It's a PT Anderson movie: a traumatised ensemble of characters, not much action, lots of talk.

That's why Snyder recruited actors not stars to breathe soul-sick life into their iconic roles. Behind a bald, buff, bright-blue coating of CG, Billy Crudup hides electric flickers of pain in the impassive face of master-of-matter Dr Manhattan. Jeffrey Dean Morgan aces his decade-spanning turn as amoral sociopath The Comedian. Matthew Goode grows steadily inside his role as millionaire mystery man Ozymandias. Patrick Wilson effortlessly convinces as the doughy impotent Nite Owl II. But his *Little Children* co-star Jackie Earle Haley is the best of the lot, nailing the sadistic self-hating Rorschach.

Admittedly, Malin Akerman doesn't make as much impact as her latex fetish costume. Scoring a porny slo-mo sex scene to 'Hallelujah' is pretty wince-inducing. And come the apocalyptic finish, anyone who hasn't read the graphic novel is probably going to be left scratching their head. Alan Moore's story is dense, detailed and never designed to be swallowed in one sitting.

Maybe this is why the full weight of emotion, grim humour and tragedy loaded in the novel doesn't (quite) come through. At times, Snyder seems to unpack the drama in slick sequences rather than one long, fluid story, intently cross cutting his way through Moore's complex weave of flashbacks, multi-character plotlines and alternate-'80s exposition. There's a saying that a masterpiece has already found its perfect medium. Snyder has done as good a job as anyone could have done. That's a loaded compliment. But as compliments go, it's a huge one. **Jonathan Crocker**

Anticipation. A three-decade wait is about to end 5

Enjoyment. Alan Moore's masterpiece has made it to the screen intact 4

In Retrospect. It would be harsh to ask for much more. Zack Snyder succeeds with an excellent adaptation 4

Head over to page 100 for the first of a four page Watchmen special featuring director Zack Snyder and cast.

VIGGO MORTENSEN: STRAIGHT SHOOTER

INTERVIEW BY ELLEN E JONES

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY VIGGO MORTENSEN

Hunt (2004)
Appaloosa (2008)
Eastern Promises (2007)
Alatriste (2006)
A History of Violence (2005)
Hidalgo (2004)
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King (2003)
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (2002)
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring (2001)

Viggo Mortensen would like you to know that his penis is far bigger in real life than it appears in the nude brawling scene in *Eastern Promises*. Just in case you were wondering. He hasn't said this out loud of course, he's far too decorous. Instead, we've done him the favour of informing it from the following exchange.

LWLies: "Is it weird to know that so many people have seen you naked?"
Mortensen: "Erm... No, I knew going in that it was... I guess when you stop to think about how many people screen grab or selectively look, it's like, well, it's not the most flattering position, or something..."

He squirms a bit at this point.
Mortensen: "I don't know, but what are you gonna do? You've got to play the scene."

Mortensen, it is clear, is an actor with an admirable sense of duty. On this crisp winter day, he is sitting in a plush suite in a posh London hotel on the latest leg of the publicity tour for his new film *Good*. A little dwarfed by the ridiculously plump sofa cushions, he is less imposing than you'd expect Aragorn, King of Men to be. His hair is mostly grey (Mortensen turned 50 last October) and has been allowed to grow over the tops of his ears. He is wearing dad jeans with a navy fleece and he's taken his shoes off. He seems tired, but then so would you if you'd recently flown through three continents in less than a week, and tiredness notwithstanding, he is thoughtful, engaged and unfailingly polite.

Born in New York and raised in Argentina, Venezuela and Denmark, Mortensen spent time as a stage actor on the East Coast before moving to Los Angeles and beginning his screen career with the role of an Amish farmer in 1985 thriller *Witness*. A series of quality supporting roles followed – alongside Al Pacino in *Carlito's Way* (1993), in Tony Scott's *Crimson Tide* (1995), and in Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998). We'll call this the pre-*Lord of the Rings* era, because after Peter Jackson's trilogy, everything changed. Along with the other principle cast-members, Mortensen was rocketed into the stratosphere of leading man, just in time for his forty-third birthday.

This comparatively late arrival has had its advantages, he says. "I learned more about how fleeting the sort of attention that sometimes comes your way can be, but mainly just how to be professional and help contribute to telling a story in the movies." Mortensen uses the phrase 'telling a story' several times over the course of our interview, where other actors might say 'playing a role' or 'getting inside a character'. It's revealing because it illustrates how he wishes to be seen, not as a virtuoso performer, but as part of a team, doing a job.

He is, however, rather an important member of that team. Mortensen is the kind of name that gets studio execs on the phone, puts scripts at the top of option piles and turns red lights to green. If the relatively small number of roles he's taken on recently is anything to go by, this is a responsibility he takes seriously. His two collaborations with David Cronenberg, *A History of Violence* (2005) and *Eastern Promises* (2007), were particularly well received and Mortensen has an idea why. "We trust each other and we know that we're both in it for the same reason. We want to tell the story really well... It's not often that you find you're on the same wavelength with another artist."

Hollywood casting agents take note: if you want Viggo Mortensen in your movie, you better have a great director and a damn good script. Or, failing that, at least make sure there are some horses. Mortensen, an accomplished rider and the author of a photography book simply titled *The Horse is Good*, has an unfortunate weakness for the four-legged beauties, which explains the tedious one-man-and-his-mare epic, *Hidalgo* (2004).

Horsey movies aside, Mortensen's post-*LOTR* roles share a unifying theme. As Aragorn, he played an archetypal man of action and every role since has seemed like a variation on that theme. Tom Stall, defender of the American home, Nikolai the Russian tough guy, a swashbuckling soldier in the Spanish language *Alatriste* (2006) and a manfully taciturn cowboy in last year's *Appaloosa*. His character in upcoming Cormac McCarthy adaptation, *The Road*, is simply called 'The Man'. And then there's *Good*.

Mortensen plays John Halder, a university professor in 1930s Germany, and a man so constitutionally averse to taking action that he gradually becomes complicit in the Nazi regime. If you've seen *Valkyrie*, *Defiance* or any of the big, blustering World War II movies out lately, then *Good* pacing may surprise. "There isn't a heroic gesture or a big tragic moment," says Mortensen, moving to the edge of the sofa as he explains. "I don't go down in a hail of bullets or save everyone or whatever, and most movies about that period, they give you that, right? This one doesn't. You're not let off the hook as an audience member."

Conversely, Mortensen conducts his own life with the kind of straightforward integrity which would be considered embarrassingly unconvincing in a modern movie protagonist. He maintains a dignified cloud of mystery around his personal life ("The people who have a lot of trouble with the press either consciously or unconsciously invite it") and he takes action for the causes he believes in. In 2004, film critic Michael Medved accused Mortensen of "ill-timed political posturing" and "pacifist preening", but Mortensen remains uncowed. "I don't just say anything. I try to stay informed as a citizen in the world, but I've always felt that when you know something's not right and that you could say something, to not do so is the same as lying. I'm not gonna shut up just 'cos someone tells me to shut up."

You'll notice Mortensen has segued nicely back to the theme of the film he's promoting. He's clever like that. If you were a film director, he's exactly the kind of actor you'd want talking up your movie: on-message, but not in a bland, PR-trained sort of way. He's passionate, informed and willing to answer a question like 'Is it weird to know that so many people have seen you naked?' without the slightest murmur of complaint.



GOOD

DIRECTED BY Vicente Amorim
STARRING Viggo Mortensen, Jason Isaacs, Jodie Whittaker

RELEASED

trailer

Are we all morons? Or is it time that Hollywood ditched the English-speaking actors with dodgy foreign accents and embraced the realism that subtitles can afford? At least this adaptation of CP Taylor's stage play has come up with a creative solution to the assumed laziness of cinemagoers. Set in Germany during the rise of National Socialism, the cast (a mixture of Brits and Americans) have opted for a uniform upper-class British drawl, thus avoiding the inadvertently comic effect of the alternative, and making a political point to boot: what happened in Germany, says *Good*, could have happened anywhere.

A fair haired and bespectacled Viggo Mortensen leads the cast as the everyman John Halder. Halder is a university professor whose personal problems (demented mother, distant wife, dead-end career) are eased by his gradual compliance with the ascendent Nazi party. He leaves his wife for Rhine maiden' Anne (Jodie Whittaker) and averts his eyes from his responsibilities with the help of cheerfully amoral wingman, Maurice (Jason Isaacs). Then the good times end, leaving Maurice in need of real friendship and Halder unequal to the task.

At first the ethical dilemmas feel familiar, and the conclusions foregone. Should Halder take a stand against the burning of books (er… yes)? Will he help his Jewish friend escape persecution (probably)? It also seems unlikely that the pro-Hitler arguments of Halder's dollybird mistress ("Anything that makes people happy, can't be bad!") would persuade a man of his education. Yet, in *Good* the cathartic act of heroism you've been conditioned to expect never arrives.

This is a film without heroes and the resulting lack of a moral centre is both unnerving and fascinating. It's not that Halder is a particularly fervent supporter of fascism, but his most passionate objections are of the aesthetic kind – he finds all that shouting and banner-waving a bit naff. Mortensen's performance proves he can do contemptible and spineless just as believably as noble and brave. It's a versatility that's rare in a leading man – especially one with such impressive bone structure.

It's a shame director Vicente Amorim's translation from stage to screen isn't quite as successful. On occasion both the acting and the dialogue sound stagy and unnuanced. Mark Strong, owner of the most menacing stare in showbiz, is effective as the Nazi officer, Bouhler, but Steven Mackintosh's insanely grinning henchman has definite shades of *Allo Allo*. The tone is also inconsistent. In one weirdly *Carry On* moment, Halder, having narrowly escaped being caught in *flagrante* with Anne, hurriedly dresses to greet his wife. When he exits the room his glasses are wonky.

But for all its flaws, *Good* is bold enough to explode a myth that many bigger, better-made war-era movies haven't even dared confront: oppressive regimes don't always bring out the best in their victims. For every individual made heroic by adversity, there must have been thousands of others with no heroic depths to be uncovered. **Ellen E Jones**

Anticipation. You've seen *Defiance* and you've seen *Valkyrie*. Is another World War II drama really necessary? ❷

Enjoyment. Seeing Mortensen play against type is a treat not to be missed, even if the script isn't quite operating at the same level. ❸

In Retrospect. Let the ideas sink in and you'll realise how unusual this movie is. ❹



MODERN LIFE

trailer

DIRECTED BY Raymond Depardon
STARRING Raymond Pinval, Raymond Depardon

Mildly evocative of compatriot docu-maker Nicolas Philibert's *Retour en Normandie*, former photographer Raymond Depardon's beguiling *Modern Life* is the result of a 10-year period spent filming the rural French farming communities of his youth. A collaborative project undertaken with the film's producer and experienced sound engineer Claudine Nougaret, the series was initiated with 2001's *Profils Paysans*.

An intimate portrait that necessitated unlimited access, *Modern Life* offers a witness to farmers' lives, values, family stories and all that binds them to the land. The film also looks at their legacies, questioning what will become of these people and their relatively uncomplicated existence in the face of rapidly advancing modernism. Set in the French highlands and disproving the notion that small-scale agriculture is dead in his homeland, Depardon's film also seeks to disassociate its participants – all carefully selected after first securing their complete trust – from the perception that their endless hard work is rewarded only with poverty, incessant rain and general misery.

As well as turning the spotlight on a rural culture rarely represented with any accuracy on screen, one of the other delights of the film is its unhurried pace. Long conversations such as a farmer bartering with a dealer over the price of a heifer are presented in one long uninterrupted take in order to allow the subjects to truly express themselves. Intended to give the viewer what Nougaret describes as 'reading time', situations are never manipulated, allowing the spectator to discover small details and telling insights for themselves.

Though visually seductive, especially for anyone longing to escape the urban jungle, *Modern Life* is also to be admired for refusing to slide into postcard lyricism. Certain sounds – such as a rooster crowing – are entirely absent. It's deceptively funny too: an over zealous farm dog in particular bringing a smile to the lips. Admittedly under the radar, this is a discovery well worth making. **Jason Wood**

Anticipation. A documentary about French farmers? Zzzzz

Enjoyment. Beautifully made, entertaining, enlightening and strangely intoxicating

In Retrospect. Makes you want to seek out the other films in the series to sample more of Depardon's work



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JAMES TOBACK: HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP

INTERVIEW BY LIMARA SALT

FILMOGRAPHY JAMES TOBACK

Tyson (1998)
When Will I Be Loved (2004)
Harvard Man (2001)
Black and White (1999)
The Pick and a Roll (1997)
The Big Swing (1993)
The Pick-Up Artist (1987)
Bagdad (1983)
Love and Money (1982)
Fingers (1978)

The first time we speak, James Toback is being shipped from country to country, festival to festival, promoting his latest film, *Tyson*. He's having trouble keeping his eyes open. "I'm not quite retarded, just slow, like I'm in another state of consciousness," he says. As the festival run finished a few weeks ago at Sundance, you'd think he'd be better rested for our second crack at an interview, but it's quite clear after all of five seconds that he's anything but. "I've had, like, three hours sleep," he admits.

Nevertheless, he's still one of the most interesting, warm and funny people you're likely to encounter in an industry that he claims not to be part of or really interested in. His latest film is a side step, an often uncomfortably intimate documentary on Mike Tyson featuring the former undisputed champ speaking frankly about every aspect of his life including the unfortunate incidents that took away his legendary status as a boxing star and turned him into a public pariah with a rape conviction, anger control issues and an apparent penchant for nibbling on other fighters' ears.

It's a reputation that you'll (perhaps reluctantly) be forced to question having seen the film, a reaction repeated around the world that has surprised the director immensely. "I've been to more festivals for this movie than any other film I've done; Cannes, Vienna, Oldenburg, London, Sundance and others that I didn't even know existed or where I didn't know the film was showing. I'm always happy for people to enjoy and react in a positive way to something, but it's been embarrassing and I say 'embarrassing' because sometimes compliments are harder to take than insults."

Toback was born in Manhattan in 1944 to a stockbroker father and academic mother who was president of The League of Women Voters and a moderator of political debates on NBC. He holds degrees from both Harvard and Columbia and dreamed of being a pianist, conductor, baseball or tennis player. He dabbled in journalism before deciding that 'great novelist' was his occupation of choice, but that didn't last long either. "I did other journalism but realised that it wasn't leading to the places I wanted to go. I went to LA to do a piece on [American footballer, actor and social activist] Jim Brown, and getting to know him I got caught in a world that was so extreme and that opened up the notion of making films to me. Then halfway through writing *The Gambler*, I realised it wasn't going to work and began imagining it cinematically."

Toback adapted the book into a screenplay, and that led to a first directing gig with 1978's *Fingers*, an unflinching story starring Harvey Keitel as a pianist torn between his art and his commitment to his loanshark father. The film used Toback's back yard as a backdrop and he admits that his hometown has always been used as such. "It seemed to be a natural background of stones I tell and characters I explore, and in a way I kind of introduced SoHo and Tribeca with *Fingers* by filming on the streets and in warehouses. I've always loved the architectural designs of the city and I've filmed all up and down it, including Central Park, but I feel I've done New York and would like to film somewhere else."

Despite breaking through at a time when the collapse of the studio system had opened the door to new, experimental young directors nicknamed the 'Movie Brats', Toback was never part of that clan and still considers himself separate from Hollywood and its rules. "There's no communal feeling from me, I don't belong to the industry. I'm not one of 'them' or one of 'us' and when they're there I'm here and when they're here I'm there. I think of myself as existing in a parallel reality. I'm not coming to film as a film nerd, techno geek or genre obsessed film buff, I'm coming as a person who has lived a wild, chaotic life and wants to fictionalise that into an aesthetic form."

Defining his younger days as 'wild' and 'chaotic' is a slight understatement of LSD induced descents into madness, excessive gambling and general recklessness that make him admit that he'd give his right leg to re-do his twenties, even though he's genuinely amazed he lived past 35. Nowadays, with a nine-year-old son, the only pills he pops are vitamins, albeit 125 a day. "I work on the assumption that life depends on vitamins and unfortunately I'm not 27 anymore. As you age you're not aware of the limitations that attach themselves to you."

It was that lifestyle that inspired his work and relationship with Mike Tyson. As he says in the film, "No one who isn't an extremist can understand the mind of an extremist." Although the reaction to the film has apparently changed people's view of Tyson, Toback's aim was something entirely different.

"Investigating him is very interesting and dramatic and it just happens to be an addition that I know him, I know that he comes across as riveting, especially when exploring his multiple natures. I always thought his life raised significant questions and contemporary themes: race, sex, crime, madness, ambition, money, fame. He's experienced everything that people endeavour to have, and one has to explore them to explore him and vice-versa."

The fact that Toback has made 10 films since 1978 already makes him an intriguing character, but as each film is drawn from experience and made perfect to the point of obsession, it's clear why he doesn't make a film every year and he has no intention of changing that. "I wait for inspiration to come from reality around me," he says. "I make my own rules as I go along."

Check out the full transcript of this interview online from the week of the film's release.



TYSON

DIRECTED BY James Toback
STARRING Mike Tyson

RELEASED

trailer

Mike Tyson is guilty of many things: violence, arrogance, stupidity. And he's guilty, too, of a crime. He stands convicted not just by the court of history as the "baddest man on the planet", but by a judge and jury in the state of Indiana as a rapist.

The question facing director James Toback is how he persuades people to spend 90 minutes in the company of a freak. Because that's what Tyson is, or at least, what he has become. "I never really had an image of myself," he says, but then he never really needed one. Tyson has been defined by others for his entire life: a creation of hype and headlines – a post-modern monster for the media age.

But here, alone on a sofa, Toback has allowed Tyson to reclaim a sense of himself – to tell his own story in his own words. The result is a head-spinning defiance of expectations.

From a small boy bullied by classmates to the undisputed Heavyweight Champion of the world, Tyson was stalked by fear. Harnessed by his trainer Cus D'Amato, it gave him the strength he needed to survive, robbed of D'Amato's guiding hand, it became the helpless rage that destroyed him.

Acting more as therapist than filmmaker, Toback coaxes some extraordinary insights into how it felt to be at the eye of Hurricane Mike. There are the parties, the spending sprees, the multiple homes and, of course, the fights – always the fights. The footage of Tyson in his heyday is both ferocious and strangely sad. It's only in the ring that his expression seems to change, when the mask drops and a kind of ecstatic rage is revealed. At his peak, Tyson possessed a savage beauty that teetered on the brink of anarchy. "In the ring I'm a god," he says. But it was outside the ring that his legacy was cemented.

More than boxing perhaps, it was the women in his life that shaped Tyson. He speaks explicitly of his sexual conquests – how he loved to dominate women in the bedroom, to find a powerful partner and break her, to tell her 'no'. For Tyson, sex and boxing were expressions of power. Here in these small, simple spaces he could turn his back on the world and take control. He could be himself, even if, in being himself, he became an animal.

Which brings Tyson to the subject of Desiree Washington – "that wretched swine of a woman". And yet, when he denies raping her in a hotel room in 1991, you might just find yourself believing him. When you've confessed to every other dirty little secret – when history has already condemned you – why continue to fight? Or is fighting written so deeply into Tyson's DNA that he simply can't stop?

James Toback hasn't set out to exculpate Tyson – against all odds, he *earns* a measure of sympathy. He's an angry, violent, contradictory man, but when he tells you that he's been betrayed by everybody he ever loved, that he lives in fear, that he's alone, you'll believe him – and maybe feel for him – because the truth is undeniable.

For the first time in his life he looks vulnerable. "I got old too soon and smart too late," he says. And then Mike Tyson – the man who once promised to eat Lennox Lewis' children – cries a wet, gurgling choke that rises from some secret place. At that point you realise that James Toback has taken you straight through the looking glass and way, way out the other side. **Matt Bochenski**

Anticipation. Spending time with the man who once said "I'll fuck you 'til you love me, faggot" promises all the ugly fascination of the psychiatrist's chair crossed with a public hanging. 4

Enjoyment. It may not take place in the ring, but this is a bruising encounter with a deeply flawed human being. 3

In Retrospect. *Tyson* won't shatter all your preconceptions, but if you don't at least question them, you haven't been paying attention. 4



THE YOUNG VICTORIA

DIRECTED BY Jean-Marc Vallee
STARRING Emily Blunt, Rupert Friend, Paul Bettany

trailer

'One' didn't know that Queen Victoria's mum tried to usurp her succession by attempting to establish her own Regency before her daughter reached 18. And 'one' didn't know that the fledgling Victoria, once ensconced in monarchy, quickly fell out of favour by giving puppy dog preferentials to then-Prime Minister Melbourne. But then 'one' clearly wasn't paying attention in history class, whereas if you know your Regina Victoriana you might rather remain on your ottoman than sit in this auditorium.

However, you'd be missing some good material in this Mills and Boon-meets-the-monarchy mash-up. There's something inherently exciting about a woman coming into power per se, especially if she's been a pawn in a maternal power play and checkmated mother Miranda Richardson. It helps, too, if you like her, and Emily Blunt's Victoria is spirited, beautiful and nice to her Corgi (okay, King Charles).

And then there is director Jean-Marc Vallée's zeitgeist grasp on how Victoria and cousin Albert's (Rupert Friend) burgeoning relationship contains contemporary dynamics. How the woman in power can emasculate. How the ideal man desires to rule 'with' rather than 'for' her. How she has to find her queenly feet before she can contemplate marriage and the pitter patter of the nine children that followed. Blunt and Friend, meanwhile, have the kind of chemistry that requires goggles and classroom supervision.

So why the bad taste in the mouth as the curtains come down? Perhaps because there's too much of the hysterical mixed with the historical. Or perhaps there's too much of the lecture hall about some of the film's expository scenes. But the weirdest thing – the thing that epitomises this peculiar combination of hard-headed history and romantic whimsy – is the fact that Martin Scorsese and the Duchess of York share a producing credit. Caught between cinematic and actual royalty, the film falls between two disparate stools.

That said, it's a grand waltz. There's real resonance in seeing Victoria both protected and abused by her mother, before seizing the role of matriarch on her own terms. And in seeing, too, how a woman fights for the right to make her own mistakes – then and only then is she ready for a relationship. It's this that makes *The Young Victoria* a very contemporary role model. **Lorien Haynes**

Anticipation. An evening down the Queen Vic

Enjoyment. Think Ibsen and Chekhov meeting Germaine Greer in said hostelry

In Retrospect. Historical romantical political hysterical verging at times on the comical

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TIME TRAVEL

DIRECTED BY Gareth Carnwick
STARRING Chris O'Dowd, Anna Faris, Dan Lennon, Kelly



What do you get if you take *Shaun Of The Dead*, subtract the zombies and add time travel? Sadly not *Frequently Asked Questions About Time Travel*.

First time screenwriter Jamie Mathieson's story of three mates who find a hole in time in the gents' toilet of their local fails to live up to its obvious model. The script has a few good ideas regarding the titular questions – does the 'Best Before' date on a packet of crisps really matter? – but the dialogue isn't funny enough to sustain the many scenes that consist of three blokes sitting in a pub talking, albeit in different time periods.

Referencing *Firefly* and *Doctor Who* might be shooting fish in a barrel when it comes to the geek audience – the *Shaun of the Dead*/*Spaced* model again – but it's also shooting yourself in the foot if your film isn't as good as the shows you refer to.

Meanwhile, debut feature director Gareth Carnvick would have done better to limit himself to in-camera techniques for suggesting time travel rather than relying on special effects to which his budget won't stretch. Cash constraints also mean that the charismatic Chris O'Dowd (the shabby dude from *The IT Crowd*) is left without actors of equal status to play off, settling instead for the surprisingly charming Anna Faris, who pops up every now and then as an inept time cop. **Alexander Pashby**

Anticipation. Time travel, eh? What questions and how frequently?

Enjoyment. How hard would it be to build a time machine to go back and work on the script?

In Retrospect. If it ceased to exist, would it really be so bad?

AMERICAN TEEN

DIRECTED BY Nanette Burstein
STARRING Hannah Bailey, Colin Clemens, Geoff Haase



Filmed over the course of 10 months at a Midwestern high school, *American Teen* chronicles the lives of five teenagers: a jock, a nerd, an artsy girl, a heartthrob and a princess. Only it's not a remake of John Hughes's '80s classic *The Breakfast Club* that slipped under the radar. It's a documentary. That's exactly filmmaker Nanette Burstein's point – to show the agony and ecstasy of being 17, minus the shallowness of fictional teen drama.

Set in the mostly white, mostly Christian town of red state Indiana, Burstein follows each teen throughout the senior year. They fit their roles perfectly: Colin is the star of the basketball team, which, according to arty weird misfit Hannah, makes him "second only to Jesus". Jake is the token and geek who's desperate for a girlfriend, despite a crippling shyness, acne and a '60s bowl cut. Mitch is the heartthrob who struggles with his reputation while dating Hannah. And lastly there's Megan, so wealthy and popular she practically rules the school. Pink Ladies-style.

As the drama plays out, you can guess the end way before it arrives. But the intense realism should be uncomfortable: these are real people. Hannah and Jake stand out particularly as they deal with being the social outcasts of the school with a good amount of wit, while the jock and resident bitch manage to garner unlikely sympathy for having tough parents. Funny and fresh, it won't break boundaries but it will make anyone thankful for growing up. **Lumara Salt**

Anticipation. Teenagers are endlessly entertaining without even knowing it.

Enjoyment. An interesting and awkward insight into a classic American institution. Like visiting the zoo, only better.

In Retrospect. Seriously, who would want to live through that again?

RIZ AHMED: ARTFUL DODGER

INTERVIEW BY MATT BOCHENSKI

FILMOGRAPHY
RIZ AHMED



Eran Creevy couldn't have picked a better name for his debut feature. There's something evasive about the way it defies expectations, dodging the pitfalls of the first time film. Because *Shifty* shouldn't work. An urban drugs drama shot in 18 days for a hundred grand, this is exactly the kind of film that audiences have learned to avoid through bitter experience.

But *Shifty* is different. Shot with a confidence and verve reminiscent of early Danny Boyle, it skips deftly around the genre's clichés, powered by a script that screams personal experience and a breakthrough performance from lead actor Riz Ahmed.

You get the feeling that *Shifty*'s biggest problem is going to be the labels that people hang on it. But the mark of its success is the way it both acknowledges and shrugs off those expectations. In that respect, it's no wonder Riz connected with the material.

Ever since he was a teenager, Riz has been ducking other people's definitions of who and what he is. Growing up in North London, he was mixing with a *Shifty* kinda crowd when he gained a scholarship to Merchant Taylors – an independent boys school on the right side of the tracks. Splitting his time between prep room and pirate radio, Riz was gaining a reputation as an MC at the same time he won a place to study Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Christchurch College, Oxford.

So… unusual. "Growing up was quite a head fuck for me, being in the area I was and seeing some of the things my brother and cousins were connected to, then going to this good school," he admits. "I used to hang round with a lot of rudeboys and gangster types who would always be taking the piss, like, 'Yeah, this is my mate Riz, he goes to a gay school.'"

We're braving a steel grey morning outside London's Southbank Centre while Riz smokes a fag. He's just moved into a flat round the corner, and more than once we stop when a mate walks past. They all have cool names ("That's Xerxes, I met him through Cyrus") and interesting stories, but none more so than Riz himself.

A privately educated Asian rapper-turned-actor, Riz is a walking, talking advert for twenty-first century Britain – a land of opportunity and self-invention. Only it's not, and he isn't. If anything, Riz reveals our awkward need to contain and define people in limited ways. The venom in his new single 'RADAR' ("Anyone, anything: put it in a box…") is born from personal experience.

"I've always had people hanging labels on me," he says. "In the UK it's, like, an obsession. You have to do one thing and people aren't really comfortable with a 'slash' job description." But doing one thing has never been his style. "I was always kind of in between," he says, "straddling two things."

At Oxford he survived by combining some serious studies with Hit & Run, a music night that became the biggest in the city. "I guess that was something for people to gather round who also felt that they didn't fit in," he explains. Oxford was "a massive culture shock… like going through trauma." After the first term he started having doubts, smoking weed and questioning what he was doing. That was when he set up the club night, deciding to forget about everybody else's expectations and just do things on his own terms, in his own way.

That's been the mantra ever since. "I think it boils down to self-definition," he argues. "If you allow other things to define you – 'I am a dinner jacket wearer', 'I am a baseball hat wearer' – then that will limit you." But it hasn't always been easy. "It's something I've struggled with for a long time," he admits, "and still do."

Part of the problem is that you can go too far the other way. "I think it can be unhealthy to some extent to always second guess what people's labelling and preconceptions of you will be because then you tailor your output to second guess or dodge those pitfalls," he says. "I'll be fucked if I'm going to push myself into a corner."

Now, finally, the work is starting to speak for itself. After getting his break in Michael Winterbottom's *The Road to Guantánamo* and TV drama *Britz*, Riz is getting closer to what he calls the 'Holy Grail', where, "You've just got a guy in a film and he happens to be Asian, his name's 'Shifty' or whatever. When you get to that point, I think that whole burden of representation kind of evaporates. That's the hope."

Based on the true story of a drug dealer from Creevy's past, *Shifty* is a chance for Riz to shrug off everything else and shine on his own terms. This isn't performance-as-impression (Riz passed up the chance to visit the real Shifty in prison), it's an edgy, energetic turn that captures the spirit in which the film was put together. "There was this tension, this nervous energy, so everyone was just on it everyday," he recalls. "I've never had so much fun on a set in my life. There's something about the fact that we couldn't fuck about stroking our chins, there wasn't a trailer to go back to, so you stay with it and you roll with the punches. There was a really enjoyable manic energy about the whole process."

But it's Riz's work at the Southbank that really seems to reflect who he is, and who he'd like to be. He was chosen by Nitin Sawhney as one of 16 emerging artists in London to put on a new music show at the Festival Hall. They came from all backgrounds – Greek violinists jamming with beatboxers and Goth rockers – and Riz was asked to stay on as an Emerging Artist in Residence, putting on more shows and working with other new artists. "I have a relationship with this building. I love the Southbank," he says, "being able to collaborate with, say, the Kathak dancers in a dance piece, or the visual artists in a music video." It's not just the multidisciplinary aspect of the People's Palace, though. The Southbank is a strange place – where cutting edge music and film are created in an environment of genteel coffee shops and polite theatrical performances. It's where the street meets the middle-class. We're not ones to harp labels or anything, but who does that remind you of?

Check out the full transcript of this interview online over the week of the film's release.



SHIFTY

DIRECTED & WRITTEN BY Eran Creevy
STARRING Riz Ahmed, Daniel Mays, Jaye Jacobs, Danny Dyer
RELEASED

Two young men lark about together on a children's ride in an abandoned playground – until one gets off, leaving his friend to twirl alone, round and round in circles that get him nowhere.

In this economically shot sequence near the beginning of writer/director Eran Creevy's debut, *Shifty*, a primal scene is being re-enacted. Four years earlier, after a drug-related tragedy, an adolescent Chris (Daniel Mays) had high-tailed it from their outer London estate to a white-collar life in Manchester, leaving his best mate Shifty (Riz Ahmed) behind to continue on a downward spiral of dealing and criminality within the community. Now for the first time, Chris has returned, ostensibly to attend a party, but really to help his friend get off the ride and grow up before he spins out of control.

Beleaguered by mounting pressures from his Muslim family, his addicted clientele (Jay Simpson is superb as a suburban family man whose life is falling apart), the police and a treacherous supplier, Shifty is a charismatic protagonist – we want to see him outrun and outwit his troubles, even if the film never shrinks from showing the people whose lives he has willingly helped to destroy.

And so Creevy's debut is all at once a complex character study, a coming-of-age drama, a good-humoured buddy pic, a 24-hour slice of social realism and an increasingly tense thriller. Better still, it's all kept on the boil by a near Aristotelian unity of time and place.

Made for under £100,000 through Film London's Microwave initiative, *Shifty* boasts convincing performances, even-handed characterisation, creeping suspense and energy to burn. **Anton Bitel**

Anticipation. Not another dimb British drama set on a council estate 2

Enjoyment. Social realism is rarely paced with such vibrant economy. The best British debut since *London to Brighton* 4

In Retrospect. If others had half its energy, the British film industry might be in better shape 4



ENCOUNTERS AT THE END OF THE WORLD

trailer

DIRECTED BY Werner Herzog
STARRING Werner Herzog
Samuel Beerson David Ashley

Hold on, we've been here before, haven't we? In 2005 Werner Herzog made *The Wild Blue Yonder*, a starkly inventive synthesis of fact and fiction shot, in part, at McMurdo Sound in Antarctica. But the man behind the camera on that occasion was DP Henry Kaiser. Now the director has made his own way to the 'End of the World', eager to explore the continent for himself.

This being Herzog, *Encounters at the End of the World* isn't your average Antarctic documentary. Where most filmmakers come for the cute animals, "My questions about nature," he tells us, "were different." No kidding. In a voiceover that sets the tone for the film's odd mix of black comedy and poignant inquiry, Herzog explains that he wants to know why monkeys don't saddle up gazelles and ride off into the sunset, or whether penguins can lose their mind. This intellectual curiosity was enough to secure him a spot on a research plane, though quite what the boffins in charge made of his questions, we never find out.

What follows is a personal take on the Antarctic wilderness. Landing in McMurdo, the main research station for assorted scientists, dreamers and existential drifters, Herzog is initially disappointed with what he finds. McMurdo is an ugly blot on the landscape – the worst bits of the West served cold – but he soon escapes to the hinterland, disappearing down caves, diving through sink holes, and trekking up the side of an active volcano.

Along with regular DP Peter Zeitlinger, Herzog has captured some arresting images, especially underwater: thousands of clams arrayed in silent worship at the foot of an iceberg; seals swimming against a shimmering sunlit backdrop of neon blue; prehistoric creatures emerging out of midnight waters. Though the original score from Henry Kaiser tries a bit too hard to induce a sense of wonder, when Herzog switches to a soundtrack of seal cries echoing like alien sonar the effect is both unnerving and awe-inspiring.

After *Grizzly Man*, *The Wild Blue Yonder* and even *Rescue Dawn*, Herzog again explores the callous reality of nature, and the way it both threatens and enriches our lives. Though his narration often reaches for the poetic, he has an unsentimental perspective of nature's cruelty. In the film's most poignant moment, he lingers on a penguin heading inland, away from the sea. There's something comic in its determination to defy the laws of nature, until Herzog reminds us that it walks to certain death. The silence that follows is as still and cold as an Antarctic dawn.

And yet... Maybe we've been spoiled by the BBC's peerless Natural History Unit, but anybody who's seen *Planet Earth* will find plenty that's familiar in the landscapes of *Encounters*. What really makes the film unique is its cast of bizarre and beguiling characters. If Antarctica is at the bottom of the world, it's the place where all the people who've fallen through the cracks inevitably collect.

There's Libor Zicha, the utility mechanic who was once imprisoned and now keeps a rucksack packed (complete with inflatable dinghy) ready to hit the road at a moment's notice. There's Stefan Pashkov, forklift philosopher, David Pacheco, a plumber descended from Incan kings. And William Jirsa, the linguistic genius who burned his PhD and headed south. Their stories breathe life into this wilderness.

But elsewhere Herzog is oddly aggressive. He talks contemptuously of absurd quests (this from the director of *Fitzcarraldo*) and 'tree huggers', which seems a strange prejudice to take to the ground zero of environmental activism.

Maybe that's a testament to Herzog's own freeform spirit of inquiry. He has journeyed literally to the ends of the earth for the simple pleasure of seeing what's there. That is itself a quest, but as *Encounters* proves, it's far from absurd. **Matt Bochenski**

Anticipation. Herzog versus the Antarctic. It's too tight to call.

Enjoyment. As a nature documentary it's nothing special. But that was never the intent. As an observational study of people and place it's pretty interesting.

In Retrospect. Has Herzog's unique imprint all over it, and raises questions that deserve careful consideration.

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DLE CHRISTIAN MADSEN & THURE LINDHARDT INTERVIEWS BY ELLEN E JONES

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY THURE LINDHARDT



FILMOGRAPHY DLE CHRISTIAN MADSEN



LWLies: How much did you know about *Flame and Citron* before you started work on the film?

Madsen: Nobody knew about them, not even in Denmark. When I was 12-years-old my dad gave me a book about the occupation. It had portraits of people who invested in the freedom fight, and in the middle of the book there was these two guys, Flame and Citron. Every time I came to those pages I couldn't get further because I was so fascinated by the photographs and by this strange story, and I had this intuition that there was something more to the story than just the official history. My dad was a colonel in the army and he was always telling me that the official story was wrong, Denmark was really a Nazi ally for three years of the war. The army felt very let down by Denmark's official policy during World War II. So he was kind of that old school guy and he said, "We were cowards, but these guys were heroes."

Lindhardt: Just after the war, they were big national heroes and kids would run around playing 'Flame and Citron' like they would cops and robbers. But then in the 1950s it changed. You could talk about the war, but you shouldn't talk about the Resistance because there were so many murders and so many mysteries, so they decided just to keep it quiet.

LWLies: Did your opinion of these two men change over the research process and during production?

Madsen: It did. In the beginning I was more into the traditional interpretation of them as war heroes, but the more work we did, I could see that the guys they had been hanging out with were really bad guys and that the truth about this side of the Resistance is not very pretty. It's grey. They are doing both the right thing and the wrong thing. So I decided that the film should be about that; about how difficult it is to do the right thing.

LWLies: Have any of the Resistance survivors that you talked to seen the film? What did they think of it?

Madsen: The guys I've been talking to liked it, but the film has split opinion in Denmark. A lot of angry reviews and debates came out of this. Some were very offended.

Lindhardt: I knew it would be controversial, but I didn't know it would be so controversial. It's 60 years ago but it's still a very hot topic because it's our history and because it's a part of our history that's maybe not the way we would like it to be. When we look at ourselves we always want to see our history as perfect. I guess it's the same with a country's mentality as well. Although we helped the Jews and we did all these great things, there's another side to it.

LWLies: What specifically did people find offensive about the themes or ideas in *Flame & Citron*?

Madsen: The fact that the film says that the Resistance did shoot a lot of the wrong people who weren't traitors, and the idea that on the leading level of the Resistance you have guys who only want to make money and advance their careers. Those statements were not very popular. But on the other hand it was a good debate, and it shows that even 65 years later you still have to deal with these questions because it's a huge story.

LWLies: One of the things that younger people find compelling about war stories is how people of that generation had much more extreme ethical dilemmas and tragedies to deal with, and on a much more regular basis. Did you find yourself reflecting on how you would have behaved in those times?

Lindhardt: Oh yes, a lot, a lot. I'm afraid I wouldn't have been a Resistance fighter. I'm afraid I would have been one of those other four-and-a-half million people who would just be quiet and try to survive. It's hard to say because the times were different from the times I was brought up in, in our part of the world at least. I think you can only answer it by experiencing it. And I hope I won't. But if I do sometime in some way or another, I would hope that I would go and fight for everyone else and sacrifice my own life for peace.

Madsen: That's what we talked about all the way through shooting. It's impossible to say what you would have done. I have kids, so I probably would have thought about it twice. If I didn't have kids I would have certainly done it. I think.

LWLies: Do you think of Flame and Citron as extraordinary men, or ordinary men in an extraordinary situation?

Madsen: I think they are extraordinary men in an extraordinary situation. They are like an example of the thesis that war makes young men do things that they would never do in peacetime. They wouldn't stand a chance in peacetime. It would be horrible for them, especially for Flame. My grandfather, for instance, was in the Resistance for a short time, but he had kids so he left. His friends who continued went into a group that was the only Resistance group to be prosecuted during the war because they killed too many people. I grew up with these guys when I was a kid – at family dinners they were there, these killers who'd been to prison for what they did.

The full transcript of both Ellen's interviews will be available online from the week of the film's release.



FLAME & CITRON

trailer

DIRECTED BY
Ole Christian Madsen

STARRING Mads Mikkelsen,
Thure Lindhardt, Stine Stengade

RELEASED

It's 1944 and Denmark is under Nazi occupation. Enraged by their government's policy of cooperation, Flame (Thure Lindhardt) and Citron (former Bond baddie, Mads Mikkelsen) have become a dashing double act at the forefront of the Danish Resistance. They commit acts of sabotage and assassinate traitors, until the arrival of femme fatale Kerry Selmer (Madsen's real-life partner and muse, Stine Stengade) blurs the line between war hero and murderer.

From *Good* to *Valkyrie* to *Defiance* to *Katyn*, World War II remains a fruitful source of drama beyond the strict confines of the war genre. Like last year's *The Counterfeiters*, *Flame & Citron* is based on a fascinating true story that was previously little known, even in Denmark. But *Flame & Citron* isn't as thoughtful a film as Stefan Ruzowitzky's award-winner. Director Ole Christian Madsen has opted rather to make a kind of action thriller meets film noir hybrid, and yet visually, at least, it works.

The immaculately dressed leads both have the kind of cheekbones that wouldn't look out of place in a *Vogue Homme* shoot, the cinematography sets off Copenhagen's architecture a treat, and there's even a shoot-out involving broken glass which, if you didn't know better, you'd swear was a cheeky nod to *Die Hard*.

Yet amidst all the action, natty dressing and double-crossing, the central relationship between Flame and Citron has been overlooked. We never really understand their friendship and that robs the dénouement of some of its rightful impact. Madsen's final image of his heroes side by side is still striking, but it's not quite as poignant as it might have been. **Ellen E Jones**

Anticipation. There's awards buzz, but it's mostly emanating from the film's own publicity people 5

Enjoyment. Madsen successfully combines a slick noir feel with the thrills of an action blockbuster 8

In Retrospect. Not particularly thought-provoking but the images do linger 6

YELLOW BRICK ROAD

DIRECTED BY Richard Curtis
STARRING Denzel Washington, Mickey Rourke, Tom Cruise



Richard Curtis takes an interesting career turn away from foppish romantic comedies to direct this melancholic biopic of Elton John suffering in the wake of Princess Diana's death. *Yellow Brick Road* centres on the superstar singer coming to terms with hair loss, his shit taste in clothes and a 50 grand-a-week daffodil habit.

In an inspired casting turn reminiscent of Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There*, Denzel Washington takes the lead as the haughty short arse formerly known as Reg Dwight, while Mickey Rourke assumes the role of his long-suffering civil partner David Furnish.

Inevitably with an A list cast of this star wattage the pair take part in some titanic thespian sparring, as if battling to claim next year's major awards with teary-eyed soliloquies and angst-ridden gazes into the distance. At one point, Washington is seen smashing up a piano with a selection of expensive vases as he struggles to write new lyrics to *Candle in the Wind* without the help of erstwhile collaborator Bernie Taupin.

This scene is just one of many examples of excruciating over-acting, leaving the film crying out for an injection of limp-wristed fun. Luckily this eventually arrives in the form of Tom Cruise, who continues his trend for quirky cameos as Elton's cocaine-dealer-turned-florist who takes the pair on a camp-fuelled road trip to Butlins in order to take their mind off things.

Despite Curtis's best efforts, however, it's clear that he is unable to unleash the full potential of the formidable talent at his disposable. If he wanted to explore the world of an overindulged twat, he should have stuck with Hugh Grant. **Ed Andrews**

Anticipation. Get out the hankies 5

Enjoyment. Get out the shotgun 2

In Retrospect. A great deal of potential wasted 1

WAVERIDERS

DIRECTED BY Joel Conroy
STARRING Dane Gerous, Kelly Slater, Easily Impressed



Born in 1883, Hawaiian waterman George Freeth is hailed as the pioneer of modern surfing. Allegedly the son of an Irishman, Freeth set out to ensure wave riding was rescued from becoming a forgotten primitive pastime.

This (perhaps tenuous) connection leads Joel Conroy's documentary to explore the unlikely Irish roots of the worldwide surfing phenomenon. Snapping between stories of the salty sea dogs who founded the sport to today's worldwide big wave riders who now rate Ireland's breaks in the same legendary league as Tahiti's Teahupoo and Hawaii's Pipeline, *Waveriders* effortlessly portrays surfing's spirit of adventure and community, making the film as much about nature in both the human and geographical context, as it is about the sport.

The difference between soul and professional surfing, and the recent introduction of tow-in surfing, is discussed by the likes of Kelly Slater and the Malloy brothers as they gaze at vicious waves from Irish cliff tops. As the North Atlantic swell spits and smashes against the coastline, grainy footage of Freeth surfing more than a century ago in Hawaii and California is intertwined.

It's an entertaining and thought-provoking take on a sport, and a lifestyle, whose identity and history is increasingly under threat from commercial interests. Whether you caress waves regularly or only pay attention when a shark attack hits the news, Conroy creates a genuine desire to throw on a duffle coat and run for the blissfully unspoilt Irish coasts. As Slater comments, Ireland's a rather cold paradise. **Kezia Clark**

Anticipation. Surfing's story has been told many times but this looks like a new slant 3

Enjoyment. Great archive footage and genuinely intelligent commentary allow *Waveriders* to transcend its roots as a surf film 4

In Retrospect. May help to convince people that surf culture isn't all brah and bullshit 4



THE DAMNED UNITED

DIRECTED BY Tom Hooper
STARRING Michael Sheen
Timothy Spall, Stephen Graham

Think Sean Bean huffing and puffing his way through *When Saturday Comes* Stallone lining up on the prison football pitch with Pele and Bobby Moore in *Escape To Victory* or the corporate gloss of the *Goal!* trilogy and you can see why films about the beautiful game are so often just for die-hard fans

But *The Damned United*, based on a remarkable book by David Peace, is as much about maniacal obsession as it is burly strikers bursting the onion bag Back in the 70s way before José Mourinho took English football by storm Brian Clough (Michael Sheen) was the original Special One "I wouldn't say I was the best manager in the country but I m in the top one " *The Damned United* follows the former England player and his right-hand-man Peter Taylor (Timothy Spall) as they find success with unfashionable Derby County

Told in flashback, the film's attention to detail belies its micro-budget with clever use of archive footage and sideline scenes that take us into the dugout, pacing the touchline with a man possessed *Frost/Nixon* star Michael Sheen transforms himself once again to channel the arrogance of a football manager who took on the prawn sandwich brigade on the board of directors to shape a winning team

But it's not just in his displays of puffed up bravura that Sheen's portrayal of Clough excels While Tom Hooper s direction captures the Derby dressing room nerves before kick off, Sheen gets under the skin of Cloughie who hits the bottle in his office with only the roar of the crowd to pull him through a 90 minutes against Leeds he dare not watch

Indeed it's a tale of Brian Clough, *uber* fuckin *alles*! when Old Big Ed (as he was not always affectionately known) takes a doomed job as gaffer at Don Revie's all-conquering Leeds United Football was riddled with violence on and off the pitch back then but Clough – now revered as the greatest manager England never had but then desperate to get a team of cloggers to play the game properly – faced a mutiny led by chain-smoking brawler Billy Bremner *This Is England*'s Stephen Graham) But after inheriting a team with fearsome players such as Norman Hunter Cloughie had no chance

This compelling piece of cinema offers a snapshot of another era that serves as a prologue to the Clough story He later went on to manage Nottingham Forest to back-to-back European Cups before succumbing to alcoholism and a fall from grace in the glare of the tabloid lens It is, as such, a very British tale and a contender for football film of the decade. **Dan Brightmore**

Anticipation. After Blair and Frost, can Michael Sheen pull off another impressionist *tour de force*?

Enjoyment. You'll be swept along by a tempestuous love story from scriptr Peter Morgan about one man and his passion for football

In Retrospect. Lacks the lyrical tragic grandeur of the book but will leave footy fans misty-eyed for the days when football was an obsession not mass marketed entertainment

MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM: INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

INTERVIEW BY MATT BOCHENSKI

When we first meet, Michael Winterbottom has got a cold. And not one of those drippy, snivelly things – we're talking a living, breathing beast of an illness that's crawled up his nose, claimed squatter's rights and thrown a week-long party for all its mates. He sounds like a cartoon version of himself.

It's way back when and we're holed up in a screening room doing press for the Raindance Film Festival. Ken Loach is knocking around nearby. Loach: the proto-Winterbottom; or is Winterbottom the neo-Loach? Either way, it's fitting that the two of them are here together, because if anybody has inherited Loach's mantle as the social conscience of British cinema, it's Michael Winterbottom.

He came through the ranks in a generation of great television directors that included Paul Greengrass and Nick Broomfield, cutting his teeth on an Ingmar Bergman documentary for Thames Television, and directing an episode of *Cracker* in the late '90s he made a pair of spiky, down-at-heel dramas, *Butterfly Kiss* (1995) and *Go Now* (1995), before *Jude* (1996) really put him on the map. At that point, Winterbottom had a choice – cash in his chips and take the Tony Curtis route of export Englishness, or really go for broke.

He chose the latter, embarking on a run of passionate, sometimes polemical, projects that would take him to Sarajevo (*Welcome To Sarajevo*, 1997), Pakistan (*In This World*, 2002, *A Mighty Heart*, 2007) and Afghanistan (*The Road To Guantánamo*, 2006), covering the last European conflict of one century, and the first American war of the next. With his signature documentary style, these films are intimate examinations of terror, hatred, torture and the loss of innocence we've suffered in their prosecution.

But Winterbottom isn't some cinematic crusader fixated on the Middle East. In between times, he's returned to Britain to make a series of quintessentially home-grown films, from the sex scandal of *9 Songs* (2004) to the Northern riot of *24 Hour Party People* (2002) to the 'unfilmable' adaptation of *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005).

"I enjoy making films," is the perfectly reasonable explanation for all this activity. As for what attracts him to certain subjects – especially those that any sensible, career-minded director wouldn't touch with a barge pole – it's not so much a political instinct as "whatever seems interesting". For *Welcome To Sarajevo*, for instance, Winterbottom explains that "I never imagined there was going to be a war in Europe and suddenly there was and it was on TV every day but people gradually ignored it."

It's not that Winterbottom's process is purely reactive, however. He's not poised in front of his TV set with a camera crew on standby, ready to roll as soon as CNN reports on some new catastrophe. "Often it can be two or three years between finding something interesting and gradually making it," he explains.

That slow, deliberate pace is partly a result of working outside the studio system. But for all that it gives him the luxury of time, there's a downside to Winterbottom's stubborn independence – the spectre of finance is always hovering nearby. Still, he reasons, it's a price worth paying: "We would rather do our films than get paid better to do someone else's," he says.

Other independent directors don't seem so sure, though. Take Shane Meadows, whose last film, *Somers Town*, was backed by Eurostar. Is this a bold new model of financing or simply selling out? Winterbottom is cagey. "I think on the whole it doesn't feel like it would be a great way of making interesting films," he says. "But the truth is, if you have got a project you want to make, whoever you take it to for the money doesn't really matter, as long as you are allowed to make your own film."

If Winterbottom has his way, these sorts of arguments will soon be a thing of the past. The future, he says, will see the old, expensive, conservative process of making films consigned to the scrap heap of history. "Now, with digital, the process of making film can become more like music where any group of friends can get together in their garage and do it," he enthuses. But as the medium opens up, it needs to have the distribution model to match. "At the moment you still haven't got that many places to show it," he admits, "but I think that with things like the internet you can broaden it a lot."

The next time we talk, a few months later, Winterbottom has given his backing to the PlayStation Shoot! project – a short-filmmaking initiative that's offering six young directors the opportunity to have their work distributed online. It's that kind of new thinking that he embraces. "You might not have a huge audience at the start but you have a sense of making a movie because someone out there is going to watch it," he argues.

Of course, getting an audience is no longer much of an issue for Winterbottom himself. His latest, *Genova*, is a quiet and intriguing story of family grief that touches on some of his favourite, familiar themes – multiculturalism, integration and misunderstanding. And he's picking up the pace, too. He's already been back with a new film in Berlin, an adaptation of Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*. As we stand on the brink of financial meltdown, it's heartening to know that Winterbottom is in our corner.

An exclusive new interview with Michael Winterbottom will be available online in the week of Genova's release.

FILMOGRAPHY MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM

Genova (2008)
A Mighty Heart (2007)
The Road To Guantanamo (2006)
A Cock and Bull Story (2005)
9 Songs (2004)
Code 46 (2003)
In This World (2002)
24 Hour Party People (2002)
The Claim (2000)
With Or Without You (1999)
Wonderland (1999)
Welcome To Sarajevo (1997)
Jude (1996)
Go Now (1995)
Butterfly Kiss (1995)



GENOVA

trailer

DIRECTED BY Michael Winterbottom
STARRING Colin Firth, Hope Davis, Catherine Keener
RELEASED 1

From the gruelling experiences of British journalist Michael Nicholson in a Sarajevo devastated by war, to the incarceration of the 'Tipton Three' at Guantánamo Bay, it isn't hard to see that physical, cultural and psychological displacement lie at the heart of the Winterbottom oeuvre. This time such themes are set in motion by the sudden death of Marianne (Hope Davis), wife of Joe (Colin Firth) and mother to teenager Kelly (Willa Holland) and her younger sister Mary (Perla Haney-Jardine). Pinning hopes of familial redemption on a change of scenery, Joe relocates to the Italian town of Genova, where he and his daughters are helped to find their feet by Joe's old university friend, Barbara (Catherine Keener).

Genova deserves to be celebrated for its cultural complexity and the concomitant questions of identity it raises. Despite beginning with a mother's death, it's less a meditation on loss than an exploration of how personal and family identity evolve in the face of trauma, displacement and the trials of adolescence.

Joe is an Englishman, who, before moving to Genova, had been living in New York with his American wife and their Anglo-American daughters. In Genova, he lectures Italian students on the divergences between Italian and English culture. His two daughters, Kelly and Mary, are in an unfamiliar city against their will, trying to adjust to their new life via desperate and sometimes dangerous means. His friend, Barbara, is an American who educates Joe and his daughters in the history of Genova. She's single and childless, though seemingly eager to take on a maternal role in their lives.

Each character offers a national and psychological doubleness, an identity-in-process, and pushes us to consider how those identities take shape when geographically and emotionally disrupted. Ironically, Joe's escapist efforts only bring into sharper focus the trauma that he so wishes his family could forget. Infused with flashes of Nic Roeg's Venice in *Don't Look Now*, Winterbottom's Genova is a superficial idyll fragmented by confrontations with grief.

Still, it all proves frustratingly predictable at times. Though sensitively rendered by a Colin Firth eager to shed the skin of costume dramas and rom-coms, the timbre of Joe's mourning – laconic and stiff upper lipped – is brought into one-dimensional cultural conflict with the frankness of American Barbara. This superficiality is concreted by a final reconciliation scene that conveniently serves up closure, where the emotional strands would look better left untied. But that can't blanch a film that's ambiguous, involving and very intelligent indeed. **Emma Paterson**

Anticipation. Colin Firth does serious 3

Enjoyment. Impressive performances will keep you glued 3

In Retrospect. Won't change your life but it should make your evening 3



FERMAT'S ROOM

trailer

DIRECTED BY Luis Piedrahita, Rodrigo Sopeña
STARRING Santi Millan, Elsa Fernandez, Alejo Sauras

"Do you know what prime numbers are?" a voice asks during *Fermat's Room*'s opening moments. "If not, you can just leave now." Luckily, you don't need to know much about maths to understand this claustrophobic thriller. Its subject matter is abstract equations, but what you'll be left with as the credits roll is clammy palms and an adrenaline comedown, rather than a school lesson buzzing in your head.

The voice belongs to Alejo Sauras, playing a floppy haired, blue-eyed cutie who just happens to be one of the world's leading mathematicians. He's working on a proof of Goldbach's conjecture, the theory that every even number is the sum of two primes. But then his laptop gets destroyed, a mysterious invitation to a meeting of mathematical minds arrives at his door, and before you can say "*Cube*," he's stuck in a room that's shrinking by the second with three other eggheads. To slow the mechanism threatening to crush them, the team must solve a series of puzzles, but each is hiding secrets that may explain what got them into this mess in the first place.

First-time writer/director team Luis Piedrahita and Rodrigo Sopena know how to hike up the suspense, and their script throws out enough red herrings that smart-arses who like to claim they saw it all coming should be kept quiet. The tension steadily grows as the room gets cosier: shots of sliding walls splintering furniture and exploding lightbulbs are interleaved with a geometrically pleasing bird's eye view of the dwindling space.

As a murder mystery, though, *Fermat's Room* is unsatisfying. There are only five characters in the film, but we don't get to know any of them well enough to make us emotionally invested in the various plot twists – things just happen. The villain, when he's revealed, is neither creepy nor compelling. There is a series of improbable coincidences and a clunky *deus ex machina* ending, while the film takes itself too seriously to let the question of why this extravagant James Bond death-trap was devised go without a proper answer.

It would have been a neat trick if the denouement of *Fermat's Room* was the logical consequence of facts given to us earlier in the film, mirroring the sort of mathematical formula that its characters are struggling towards. But perhaps that's too pedantic a gripe about what remains a confidently shot, fast-paced first feature. **Jess Holland**

Anticipation. Academics in peril? Arcane puzzles to solve? Oh dear, this sounds like another *Da Vinci Code*. ❶

Enjoyment. Racing heart? Check. Twists and turns? Check. This thriller thrills. ❸

In Retrospect. You know the sense of lingering satisfaction you get when you solve a difficult puzzle? *Fermat's Room* doesn't give you that. ❷

BY STEPHEN SPROUSE

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PAOLO SORRENTINO: GREAT CRUSADER
INTERVIEW BY NICK HASTEO

The henchmen come swaggering out of their limos one by one, reeking of ostentatious power, looking like *Reservoir Dogs*. This scene from the Cannes Jury Prize-winning *Il Divo* has the high-octane style you expect from Paolo Sorrentino, whose second feature, *The Consequences of Love* (2004), announced him as the director most likely to take his national cinema out of the post-Fellini doldrums. But these are no gangsters. They're the frusted cabinet of Giulio Andreotti, Italian Prime Minister seven times from 1972 to 1992, and a force in the country's clandestine affairs since the fall of Mussolini. In *Il Divo*, Sorrentino has harnessed a talent prone to the gaudy to a forensic examination of his country's corrupt political heart, and of a modern Machiavelli.

Sorrentino is a gentle 37-year-old seemingly at odds with his films' cruel ironies. Like most of Italy's best young directors, the influences of early 1970s Hollywood and current US indie cinema helped him step free of the shadows of Fellini and co. When we speak he's just returned from a road trip to Texas and New Mexico. "*No Country for Old Man*!" he grins. But *Il Divo* had less likely influences too. "All my films are in some way influenced by English films," he says. "When I did *The Family Friend* [2006, about a troll-like loan shark again betrayed by love], it was influenced by Mike Leigh's *Life is Sweet*. And without Stephen Frears's *The Queen*, I don't know if I could have made *Il Divo*. Andreotti was something in Italy for many, many years that was beyond power. He was a constant, a bit like the Queen. An icon, a symbol."

Toni Servillo, the icy Mafia accountant whose heart fatally melts in *The Consequences of Love*, and a chief mobster in *Gomorrah*, plays Andreotti as another master of emotional suppression, voice uninflected and lips barely flickering as he plots. In real life, Servillo is a volcanic force in Neapolitan theatre. That damped-down power simmers for Sorrentino. "Yes, because he is a man who's full of energy, and I force him to play roles that are extremely restrained," he admits. "And he suffers considerably for this. In my first film [2001's *One Man Up*] his role was much more energetic and dynamic and extrovert – and much closer to him in real life."

Il Divo examines the murder of Andreotti's great rival, and Italy's former Prime Minister, Aldo Moro by the Red Brigade in 1978, already the subject of Marco Bellocchio's haunting *Good Morning, Night* (2003). Andreotti, *Il Divo* suggests, may have let Moro die, also countenancing extremist outrages in Italy throughout the '70s to sustain a climate of fear and with it public appetite for his brand of autocracy.

He's a man Sorrentino should hate. But, as with Oliver Stone's takes on Nixon and Bush, Andreotti becomes a creepily fascinating anti-hero. "No, no, no, no," Sorrentino says, appalled. "If he does come out of the film as a hero, it's totally involuntary, because I never thought of him as one. There are many reasons for hating him. But often the reasons why one hates someone are also the reasons why one is drawn to them. It's a natural feature of powerful men that the evil part of them is hugely appealing – Kissinger is that way too. One is attracted by ambiguous, mysterious people, not the good guys. And Andreotti was an absolute champion of ambiguity. From a political point of view, that's a scandal. But from a human point of view, it's fascinating."

In *Il Divo*'s most daring scene, Andreotti confesses his sins to the camera. Wishful thinking? "Yes. Only at that point do I leave factual truth, and express my own views. The objective was to create a sort of catharsis for the audience. Because everyone had been wondering for 50 years what he's responsible for. And at a certain point it felt necessary to scream out some responsibility. Something I wish he'd say."

Such potentially controversial scenes haven't hurt *Il Divo*'s reception in Italy. "It's had very good box-office. What impressed me was that Italian audiences saw it for what it was – a film. My fear was that anybody who was old enough to know about the things it represents would have reduced it to its politics. But the cinematic language and style are the things I care about. The people who saw it did, too."

Alongside *Gomorrah* by fellow Neapolitan Matteo Garrone, Sorrentino's film has led to claims of an Italian renaissance, after both movies starred in Cannes last year. "Two films is rather few to launch a renaissance," he cautions. The films are, however, related. "Somebody said that my film shows why certain things happen, and *Gomorrah* shows the consequences," Sorrentino confesses. "Unfortunately, being from Naples, that film doesn't actually strike me as something unusual. Having lived there for 37 years I know it's true. In my film, I'm not setting out to portray Andreotti's faction as gangsters as such. That would be too easy. But it's true the politics around him had a very vertical character. That's exactly how it is in the Mafia. You have your *capo* and your henchmen, who obey absolutely."

Il Divo finally seems a summation of Sorrentino's previous work – like *The Consequences of Love*'s Iceman and *The Family Friend*'s squalid loan shark, Andreotti is a powerful man who goes too far. "I do like to explore relationships of power, as most human relationships are poisoned by it," agrees the director. "This is my ultimate film in that sense. Because this one goes straight to the core of the problem, without any metaphors at all. For this reason, it won't be easy to make the next film. I've said the last word on the subject that interested me. I've made four films now, and that seems enough. It's not necessary to make one every two years. Pontecorvo made four films, and he was a great director..."

Check out the full version of this interview online to get the low-down on the film's release.

FILMOGRAPHY
PAOLO SORRENTINO

Il Divo (2008)
The Family Friend (2006)
The Consequences of Love (2004)
One Man Up (2001)



IL DIVO

RELEASED 1

DIRECTED BY Paolo Sorrentino
STARRING Toni Servillo, Anna
Camerlo, Paolo Graziosi

trailer

Or: *The Extraordinary Life of Giulio Andreotti* That subtitle is a nod to the grim fairytale gloss laid over the potent, shadowy symbol of Italy by director Paul Sorrentino. Andreotti was Prime Minister seven times; he also stood trial on 26 occasions for connections to the Mob along with a string of murders and apparent suicides, including that of Roberto Calvi, the Vatican banker found hanging from London's Blackfriars Bridge. Each time Andreotti was acquitted, but his poison still infects Italian political life. Most tellingly, many believe Andreotti benefitted from or was even complicit in the 1978 kidnap and murder of Aldo Moro, former Prime Minister and his political opponent within the Christian Democrat party.

The death of Moro remains the key moment in post war Italy – politically, culturally, intellectually – and is the metronome by which Sorrentino measures out his protagonist's denial and secret agonies. But don't expect histrionics. Tony Servillo, who imbued *The Consequences of Love* with such still passion, plays Andreotti with a quiescent certainty of purpose, an autistic Nosferatu progressing unscathed as his fellow travellers meet a variety of unhappy endings. It's a mesmerising performance – touching, comic and utterly repellent.

Sorrentino skips around a conventional narrative, telling the convoluted story through a string of striking motifs. Andreotti stalking the night alone but for his bodyguards; his recurrent ironic framing as a Christian martyr – a toilet cistern at one point serving as a halo; the pose of apparent remorse which proves to be nothing more morally contrite than a migraine. The movie relentlessly, hypnotically conflates the monkish and the diabolical in the man known by the public as 'The Hunchback' or simply 'Beelzebub'.

Sorrentino's detractors will continue to complain that his work is overly mannered, emotionally detached and self-consciously shot. *Il Divo* certainly has its share of flashy visual tricks and bombast. But here the stylistic ticks are justified by the creation of a masterful study in moral ambiguity, a spoken-word opera of high tragedy and the most degraded principles. According to Tony Servillo, Andreotti saw the film and hated it. But then came the Grand Jury prize at Cannes and huge success in Italy. Il Divo Giulio, never one to side with losers, has since 'reconsidered' his opinion. **Paul Farrelough**

Anticipation. *The Consequences of Love* was breathtakingly fresh. *The Family Friend* was queasy lascivious. Rumpelstiltskin sex-perving 4

Enjoyment. Visually overwhelming, intellectually exhilarating. Just don't expect to understand Italian politics in 110 minutes. Or months. Or years for that matter 4

In Retrospect. Beautifully filmed, simply told and more powerful than any polemic. And the real kicker to take away from the cinema? The knowledge that Andreotti is a Senator For Life who does mobile phone ads on the telly 4



THE INTERNATIONAL

DIRECTED BY Tom Tykwer
STARRING Clive Owen, Naomi Watts, Ulrich Thomsen

Timing is everything. It's a measure of *The International*'s credibility as a vaguely pompous yet mercilessly entertaining conspiracy thriller about global banking baddies that it can get away without a single unintentional inter with the climactic line uttered by non-ironic hero Louis Salinger (Clive Owen), "There must be a way to bring down this bank!"

Salinger is a former Scotland Yard hotshot turned Interpol agent who comes from the time before banks were easy to bring down and mostly do it by themselves. Instead, here, in the glamorous globe-trotting frames of *The International*, as written by Eric Singer and directed by the German master stylist Tom Tykwer the evil International Bank of Business and Credit runs the world, is about to broker a huge arms deal between China and Iran, and can only be brought down by the persistent meddling of one determined Interpol agent and his attractive American sidekick Eleanor, played by Naomi Watts.

Yes, it's wildly idiotic stuff, and includes a post-assassination crime scene that's far too easy to master (two pencils plus two bullet holes plus two minutes contemplation equals crime solved!). But Tykwer nonetheless displays a pelting sense of pace, and repeatedly employs close-ups on Owen's ingenuous mug to devastating effect. Is there nothing this man can say that doesn't sound like it's been ripped from his very soul ("They'll get to you! If they can't get to you, they'll get to your family!")? Plus, in the greatest inter-ballistic masterstroke since the lobby scene in *The Matrix*, or the climactic heist in *Heat*, Tykwer and co pulverise the entire interior of New York's Guggenheim Museum, turning a routine surveillance job for Salinger into one epic, and relentlessly cacophonous shootout. **Kevin Maher**

Anticipation. A Clive Owen banking thriller? Oh go on then!

Enjoyment. Like a well-oiled thriller machine where bankers are bad guys this is a guilty guilty pleasure indeed.

In Retrospect. Still guilty.

TRAITOR

DIRECTED BY Jeffrey Nachmanoff
STARRING Don Cheadle, Guy Pearce, Saïd Taghmaoui

'The truth is complicated,' reads the tagline to *Traitor*, a film that pitches itself as an intelligent international thriller absorbed in the margins where terrorism, spooks and government contractors meet.

Samir Horn (Don Cheadle) is a former US special ops officer arranging an arms deal with Omar (Said Taghmaoui), terrorist leader of the Islamic Brotherhood. When both are captured and imprisoned in a Yemeni jail, Samir's devout Islamic faith impresses Omar who breaks him from jail and into the Brotherhood.

Traitor could be a classic Cold War thriller, unfolding between parking lots, parks and parties in London, Marseilles, Nice, Chicago, Canada and the Yemen. But its aspirations are far more contemporary, and far more controversial.

Playing with our assumptions that Samir is the titular traitor the film's essential drive is the resolution of who, and what, he betrays. This narrative uncertainty lends itself to some bracing moral ambiguity.

Samir is a terrorist. But, as impressively played by Cheadle, he's also a devout, intelligent and complex man whose motivations are unclear. Other more well-worn genre roles such as Guy Pearce's straight-arrow FBI agent and Jeff Daniels's shady contractor hint at implicit American soul-searching, but the moral looking glass remains pointed at Samir and his associates.

There is, however, a difference between portraying a view and supporting it. The target here is informed subjectivity rather than moral relativism, something lost on many American critics.

Traitor has its faults. It's overlong, contrived in parts and resorts to some predictable tactics. The irresistible question is whether the US would be making films like this if 9/11 hadn't happened. **Jon Williams**

Anticipation. Can Cheadle carry the weight of post-9/11 soul searching?

Enjoyment. An admirably reflective thriller.

In Retrospect. An intelligent response to fundamentalism and faith in mainstream wrapping.

"DRUGS AND POLITICS: WHAT MORE COULD YOU ASK FOR?"

★★★★

LITTLE WHITE LIES

AN ALEX GIBNEY FILM

GONZO

THE LIFE AND WORK OF DR HUNTER S. THOMPSON



★★★★★

NEWS OF THE WORLD

★★★★★

FHM

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JENNIFER LYNCH: BOXING CLEVER

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN CROCKER
WORDS BY ANTON BITEL

FILMOGRAPHY
JENNIFER LYNCH

[illegible] (2000)
[illegible] (1993)

Ordinarily, there can be no higher accolade for an artist than seeing their family name become critical shorthand for a whole collection of singular aesthetic values. But describe the work of Jennifer Lynch as 'Lynchian' and you are in fact invoking the style of someone else entirely. Being the daughter of David Lynch, Hollywood's celebrated master of cinematic darkness, can have its disadvantages, not least among them the curse of comparisons. It is a curse that has plagued Jennifer throughout her career.

In fact, Jennifer's creative life has been intertwined with her father's from the start. As a newborn she provided the crying for the soundtrack to his early 1967 short *The Alphabet*, while the casting in which she was swathed as an infant (she was born with clubbed feet) clearly influenced the appearance of the 'baby' in his debut feature *Eraserhead* (1977). "I was a happy kid," she told *LWLies*, when we caught up with her at last year's Cannes Film Festival. "Even living in a garage with crazy artist parents, totally broke, my Dad with a paper round. Broke. Crazy." Crucially, she stresses the freedom that she was given to think for herself. "I've never had limitations put on my imagination."

Later she would gain experience at her father's side on the sets of *Dune* (1984) and *Blue Velvet* (1986) – and then, when his TV series *Twin Peaks* became a cult hit, Jennifer, aged just 22, was entrusted to write *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*, which would remain on *The New York Times* Best-Seller List for 15 weeks. Two years later, in 1993, she directed her first feature, *Boxing Helena*, based on a screenplay that she had in fact written five years earlier.

And that was when the trouble started.

This freakily transgressive debut was in fact a genuine landmark and ought to have been a triumph for the fledgling filmmaker. Jennifer was now the youngest woman in American film history to direct a feature and had also garnered a nomination for the prestigious Grand Jury Prize at Sundance. The critics, however, saw things differently, and their barbed comments were quick to shift from evaluative response to barely veiled character assassination.

This '[Lynch mob]' of reviewers was, as Jennifer reflects, "super-unkind. And not even super-unkind to *Boxing Helena*, super-unkind to *me*. Like I'd done something personally to them. Which blew my mind. Like, why are they so pissed at me? It's a movie! You don't walk into the Museum of Modern Art and hate a sculpture and say, 'That sculptor is such a fucking asshole!'" Her first attempt to find an independent voice had made her a pariah.

That was 15 years ago. In the meantime, she's directed the odd short, an episode of something called *Joe Bob's Drive-In Theater*, had a daughter of her own (now 12-years-old), and endured three spinal surgeries following a car accident. "For a while," she says, "I didn't know if I was going to walk again." That wasn't all she needed to recover from before making a comeback. "I needed," she admits, "to figure some shit out, to be honest with you. Figure out how I was still gonna do what I loved doing. And not take it so personally when people slung crap at me."

Evidently it was time well spent. Her second feature, *Surveillance*, is a serial-killer thriller that boasts a *Rashomon*-like layering of perspectives, a bleakly nihilistic morality and a discomfiting twist all wrapped up in a hyper-real visual style that transforms the American backroads into a nightmare. No question, it was one of Cannes 2008's most gratifying surprises. Asked about her influences, Jennifer cites "Kurosawa, Hitchcock, Billy Wilder," before adding, "David Lynch." Indeed, in this tale of wild-at-heart lovers racing down a lost highway, it is not hard to see the legacy of the father being passed on to the daughter.

Still, this chip off the old block has a few tricks of her own. The grimly ambivalent close of *Surveillance*, for example, is what Jennifer loves most about her film – but after David (who is executive producer) had read her script, he was so troubled by it that he rang her up late one night pleading with her to find a different ending. She stuck to her guns, and the result is the best kind of devastation.

Even the casting of Bill Pullman in a lead role is not as derivative as it first appears. Jennifer has long been a fan of his, almost casting him in *Boxing Helena* – and it was in fact she who first introduced the actor to David. "My father had never seen Bill's work. When he was casting *Lost Highway* he didn't know Pat Arquette and he didn't know Bill Pullman," she explains. "And I said, 'Oh my god, you have to see *True Romance* and you have to see *The Serpent and the Rainbow*', and all these films. And he fell in love with both of them." So it seems that the influence of father on daughter is in fact a two-way street.

Given the mauling she received over her first feature, releasing *Surveillance* ought to bring all kinds of pressures with it, but Jennifer is just happy to be doing something that she loves. "People are gonna think what they're gonna think about it," she says. "And I certainly wasn't trying to make a film that people loved. Ultimately, what matters is that, at night, I go to bed and say I made the film I wanted to make. So in case they say, 'You suck and your film sucked!' I don't take it so personally. That's a lesson I learned from my father. Once you're done, let it go. Walk away."

So there he is again – her father, the elephant in the room. And yet, when *LWLies* cheekily comments that the opening sequence of *Surveillance* – an impressionistically violent home invasion in the dark – is 'very Lynchian', Jennifer just smiles warmly. Are we in trouble? "No, you're not in trouble!" she laughs. "I am who I am. Who knows? Thank you. It's the way I saw it." Lynchian, it seems, is not merely a term that she has inherited, but one that she is starting to make all her own.

[illegible] out the full transcript of this interview online from the week of this film's release.



SURVEILLANCE

trailer

DIRECTED BY Jennifer Chambers Lynch
STARRING Bill Pullman, Julia Ormond, Pell James

RELEASED

At the core of *Surveillance* is Stephanie (Ryan Simpkins), an eight-year-old girl who has witnessed 'some things children shouldn't see', and who's been ignored ever since by every adult she has tried to tell. She might even, at a stretch, be regarded as a symbolic stand-in for the film's director, Jennifer Lynch. In 1993, the then-24 year old daughter of David Lynch became the youngest American woman ever to make a feature. That feature was the disastrous *Boxing Helena* – and Lynch was then shunned, overlooked and marginalised for over a decade by an industry that was not interested in her peculiar vision.

This *Rashomon*-esque tale of multiple perspectives and split personalities sees Lynch back with a vengeance, taking the viewer by the throat with scenes of abuse, nihilism and casual depravity. After a brief prologue that shows two masked serial killers at work, the film begins with Federal Officers Sam Hallaway (Bill Pullman) and Elizabeth Anderson (Julia Ormond) arriving at a small-town police station the day after a roadside massacre, hoping to determine whether a coherent account of what happened can be gleaned from the three survivors' testimonies.

Young cokehead Bobbi (Pell James) has lost her boyfriend Johnny (Mac Miller). Local officer Jack Bennet (co-writer Kent Harper) has lost his patrol partner Jim Conrad (French Stewart). And little Stephanie has lost her entire family. But each has a guilty secret that they are desperate to conceal, and no one is quite who they seem.

Surveillance certainly comes with a killer twist, but the third-act revelation here avoids appearing a mere gimmick by picking up closely on themes of anomie, corruption and moral emptiness that have in fact permeated the whole film. If the viewer suspects anyone and everyone of being a cold-blooded killer, that's only because Lynch carefully establishes the capacity within us all for smiling amorality. As one character puts it, "It's fucking dark in here – there's no light."

The parallel storylines are deftly handled in all their duplicity, and Peter Wunstorf's cinematography is a hyperreal pleasure unto itself. Sporting a buzz-cut, Pullman reveals for the first time his ability to act without channelling all his energies through his mobile forelock. And although her tale involves wild-at-heart lovers racing down a lost highway, Lynch has created a whole different shade of black from anything made by her father. **Anton Bitel**

Anticipation. The name Lynch carries a lot of weight around these parts

Enjoyment. It's no straight story but a pitch-black and hugely original thriller

In Retrospect. Devilishly plotted and unremittingly bleak to the last



IN THE LOOP

DIRECTED BY Armando Iannucci
STARRING Peter Capaldi, Tom Hollander, Chris Addison

trailer

Think of a great British TV satire of the last two decades – *The Day Today*, *I'm Alan Partridge*, *Friday Night Armistice* – and writer/director Armando Iannucci is likely to have been involved. *In the Loop* is his feature debut and springs directly from his last TV success *The Thick of It*. A fan of *Yes, Minister*, Iannucci updated the cabinet comedy for the era of Blair, New Labour and spin. Here, he takes that notion – and many of *The Thick of It*'s characters and cast – for a look at the build-up to Iraq War II.

Peter Capaldi's bile-spewing proto-Alastair Campbell, Malcolm Tucker is the eye of this film's desert storm (the target of the brewing war is never mentioned). Capaldi seems determined to shock and awe the audience from his first bug-eyed, foul-mouthed appearance. Tom Hollander is Tucker's hapless ministerial target, caught up in a series of linguistic gaffes, barely aided by Chris Addison, essentially reprising his role from *The Thick of It* as civil service neophyte, Toby.

A visit to Washington ratchets up the film's ambition and the laughs. David Rasche (*Burn After Reading*) is excellent as a micromanaging Rumsfeldian hawk who supposedly keeps a live grenade on his desk, while James Gandolfini is the general who doesn't want to go to war. Iannucci perfectly captures how out of their depth the Brits are when confronted by the reality of Washington.

There's always a risk that you lack perspective when tackling very recent history, but Iannucci's triumph is so consummate you may want to go back to media coverage of the era with the added insight it affords. In the time of Obama, Brown and the financial crisis, war can seem a distant issue, though a laugh may help. And while *In the Loop* works admirably as a one-off alongside *The Thick of It* (you don't need to know the series to find the film very funny indeed), whether you have to see it on the big screen – it's made by BBC Films – may depend on how credit crunched you're currently feeling. **Jonas Milk**

Anticipation. It might not have been a vintage year in Utah, but this was still heralded by some as the best film at Sundance.

Enjoyment. Top swearing, well done.

In Retrospect. Or you could wait for it to come to the small screen.



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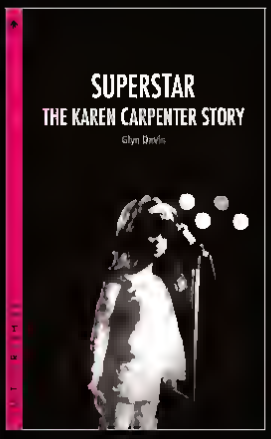
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KELLY REICHARDT: AMERICAN WOMAN

INTERVIEW BY MATT BOCHENSKI

FILMOGRAPHY
KELLY REICHAROT

Wendy and Lucy (2008)
Old Joy (2006)
River (1997)
River of Grass (1994)

Kelly Reichardt looks exactly like you'd expect. She's apologetically small, like someone trying not to take up too much space, softly spoken but intense, given to making small statements that connect to grand themes in sudden and unexpected ways. In other words – just like her films.

Those films, four of them to date spread over 14 years, have barely scraped past the feature-length mark, but each of them has been an intimate gem – a dispatch from a world that looks disconcertingly alien, an unpantomimed, unvarnished reality.

Reichardt is emerging as independent cinema's great short-storyteller. Her films have a self-contained, almost haiku-like approach to narrative, where economy – of emotion, of expression, of time and of finance – is everything. To Reichardt, small is beautiful. "It's minimalism from beginning to end. That's what I have to work with and that fits my story-telling mode," she says, settling back into a chair with a coffee, slightly flushed – she's been shopping and we're running late. "The thing about keeping it small is that nobody is paying attention," she continues. "There's nobody giving me script notes, except for my friends that I go to – my peers that I want notes from. There's nobody telling me to be done for a certain festival, there's no test screenings. The films are all made very privately."

Like all of Reichardt's films, *Wendy and Lucy* was shot in Oregon, and is based on a story by *Old Joy* writer Jon Raymond. It deals in alienation, friendship, sacrifice and heartbreak, and offers a vision of an older America that's withering away. "My characters are very typical for what I know," says Reichardt. "They are outsiders but it's because the streamlining of American culture and the corporatisation of American culture is so widespread and vast that there is this question of 'is there a room for this?'"

Wendy, played with a quiet, sensitive brilliance by Michelle Williams, is pursuing that classic American dream of The West – travelling across the country in search of a better life. But for all that Wendy is connected to a great libertarian tradition of self-dependence and opportunity, it becomes tragically clear that there's simply no place anymore for people like her in twenty-first century society.

The idea of an alternative America is fast becoming just that – a theory rather than a reality. "I used to drive across the country with my family when I was a kid and every state was particular. You knew when you were in a certain state from the local food to the local radio station to whatever it was that made it unique," Reichardt explains. "Now I drive across country and it doesn't matter what state you're in – as soon as you get off the coast it's all just chain stores, and the media is all Clear Channel, and the only local radio you can find is Christian radio. So people in my films have the life I know – are who I know – but it's never going to look mainstream to people because that's become a very homogenised corporate culture. We should forget the War on Terror the war on the corporatisation of America should be worked out a little bit more."

It turns out that the battle lines of the culture wars have been stealthily redrawn. It's not issues that are at stake now for America's liberals, but the very idea of 'ideas' itself. "The thing that really works for the right wing in America is that so much of the population is under-educated, and more so all the time with the attack on science in schools. The reality is that if you go to certain states that teach creationism in school, like in Kansas, then you can't go anywhere and get into college," Reichardt argues. "Even the right wing journalist David Brooks, the op-ed guy in *The New York Times*, even he acknowledges the Republicans' complete assault on thinking. Anyone with higher education is referred to as 'elitist'. But elitism is anybody that's reading about any other culture, that's travelling anywhere. Something like 80 per cent of Americans will never leave America. It's like saying 'Marxism'. It's not an in-depth thought, it's just a flash of something that isn't 'American'."

As America dips into recession, however, there's a sense that alternative lifestyles are on the rise once more. "There is this big community of young people who are choosing to live outside the system, which is a throwback to the depression-era times," says Reichardt. "If you don't have a net of family support, or financial and social, then your options are really quite limited, but there are these kids who say – instead of having a proper job and getting money to pay rent, to just exist – they say, 'You know, I'll choose this other, alternative lifestyle'. Those are the kids in the beginning of the film, these gutter punks. They're homeless and they travel across the country hopping trains – and it's quite a dangerous life to be hopping trains in a post-9/11 world in America – and they live a very rough life but they do live off the grid."

But after eight years of a Bush administration in which any deviance – moral, social, religious – was seen as a threat, Middle America isn't going to give ground without a fight. "Anything that's slightly alternative, it all gets sold as just a drain on society," Reichardt admits. For her, the frustration is that many Americans who have sided with the Republican Party are the very people who have been hurt by its policies. "The middle of America votes for the party that works against them all the time," she argues. "They keep them under-educated, they keep them going into the military, keep them afraid of the government."

And Reichardt? Where does she find herself in all this? Born in Florida, schooled in New York, working in Oregon – which country does she belong to? "I'm an American," she says. "Whatever that means."

Check out the full transcript of this interview online next the week of the film's release.



WENDY AND LUCY

DIRECTED BY Kelly Reichardt
STARRING Michelle Williams, Wally Ballou, Will Patton

RELEASED [redacted]

trailer

The beauty in the work of Baudelaire, TS Eliot once wrote, is in the way it conjures 'the *poésie des departs*, the *poésie des salles d'attente*' It wasn't so much the journey as the liminal spaces between them that captured the poet's imagination – the possibilities, dreams and regrets that places of departure set before the soul

In *Wendy and Lucy*, Kelly Reichardt plays with the flipside the agony of stasis, and the loneliness that comes from being stuck between a nebulous here and a distant there.

Michelle Williams is Wendy, a young drifter passing through the Pacific Northwest on her way to Alaska. Unlike Christopher McCandless, hero of Sean Penn's *Into The Wild*, Wendy is an old-fashioned economic migrant, heading West to find work, not just herself Lucy is her dog, her only friend and companion, but after their car breaks down, a series of unfortunate twists sees them parted, bringing Wendy's life of perpetual motion to a sudden, jarring stop

Working from a Jon Raymond short story, Reichardt has assembled a tender and intimate drama that deftly touches on subjects ranging from America s class divide (in which principles are the privilege of the wealthy), to industrialisation and self-identity. "You're a long way from home, aren't you?" asks a friendly security guard, but Wendy has no home no history, no identity.

Reichardt's great strength as a director is her empathy, and her feeling for America as a bewildering place. Having lived and worked in New York for 20 years, she brings an outsider's perspective to America's heartland, and finds it a strange and intimidating country.

That it's also graced by moments of quiet humanity is central to the appeal of her films Her characters are vulnerable and imperfect (how you react to Wendy may hinge on whether you think her troubles are self-inflicted), but they are also dignified and real, capable of love and – perhaps the hardest thing of all – self-sacrifice

Shot almost entirely outdoors in natural light, with understated performances and a soundtrack composed from the noise of an ever-present railroad (as both a metaphor of impermanence and a subtle nod towards Raymond's original title, *Train Choir*), like *Old Joy*, *Wendy and Lucy* is a film of small details and unassuming craftsmanship It may be too slight for some, but if you let it get under your skin, it packs a devastating emotional coda **Matt Bochenski**

Anticipation. *Old Joy* was good but it wasn't really *that* good 6

Enjoyment. A tender and lovely little film 8

In Retrospect. Reichardt is carving her own niche – love it or leave it 6



THE AGE OF STUPID

trailer

DIRECTED BY Franny Armstrong
STARRING Pete Postlethwaite, Piers Guy

Nothing promotes apathy quite like being preached at, so it's great to find that the latest captivating and 'powerful' eco-documentary, *The Age of Stupid*, is actually a captivating and powerful piece of filmmaking as well as a call-to-arms to help the planet. Taking a look at our current devil-may-care attitude to climate change from a fictional 2055, Pete Postlethwaite plays an archivist at the helm of a deserted futuristic museum (or maybe mausoleum would be more apt) of the human race, hoofing around on his own while the planet disintegrates around him. He delves into the video vaults to compile the case for the prosecution in a trial that pits our current destructive indifference against the environmental havoc that will ensue unless we get our heads out of our proverbial behinds and halt climate change.

Pete's archive footage is all genuine, gleaned from recent news items or filmed by director Franny Armstrong and her crew putting the climate change argument out there with real people. There's the Indian businessman bringing low cost air travel to the working classes despite the pollution, the Hurricane Katrina survivor who earned a living in the oil industry, and the Nigerian living with the after effects of Shell Oil on her country.

It's hard to decide whether the grim fate that awaits us if we don't act is more shocking than the excuses we find not to do anything. Take Piers and Lisa, two renewable-energy champions who initially come across as middle class do gooders, but whose plight to install a wind farm in their rural village is opposed by their neighbours, blind to the fact that their beautiful country views can *only* be preserved by the odd wind turbine on the horizon. These people are unbelievable.

Interspersed with some natty animation, *The Age of Stupid* manages to blend the factual with the emotional without ever feeling too earnest or didactic. The only problem for the film could be that it may only reach the converted – the kind of audience who pay to see an independent eco-documentary – rather than the masses. **Laura Bushell**

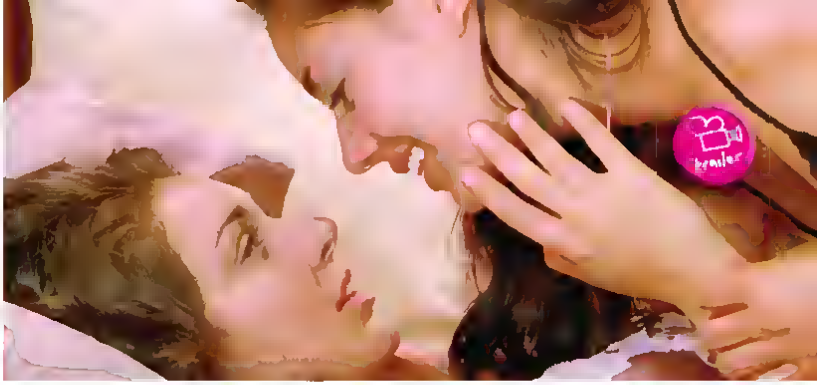
Anticipation. Al Gore taught us the climate change facts, but this mixture of fiction, documentary and animation looks far more interesting.

Enjoyment. Thoughtfully put together and well researched, it's incredibly interesting as well as being well a bit terrifying.

In Retrospect. Very persuasive and engaging, let's hope it reaches a big audience.

I CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT

DIRECTED BY Shamim Sarif
STARRING Lisa Ray, Sheetal Sheth, Nav Wadia



That *I Can't Think Straight* even scored a release is already a significant victory. Beset by myriad snafus throughout production – at one point a backer disappeared with the reels, and director Shamim Sarif spent a year in court trying to get them back – it's very existence is a triumph for independent cinema. But it's such a mish mash of terrible ideas sabotaging sincere themes that you have to wonder if it was worth fighting for.

Any complaint has to begin with the dubbing. For a film shot primarily in the UK with English-speaking actors, it defies sense, instantly putting up a wall that's impossible to get over. And even if you could, there's not much on the other side.

Tala (Lisa Ray) is a shy girl on the cusp of understanding that she's a lesbian, who maintains an uneventful heterosexual relationship more for friendship than anything else. It's not until she meets Leyla (Sheetal Sheth) that Tala realises the truth while gradually falling in love. Sheth and Ray have some real chemistry and the resonance of their passion and affection stands out against the other off the shelf characters and the quagmire of rom-com cliché elsewhere.

But as this romance delicately unfolds, Sarif chooses to pepper the dialogue with a political discourse on the Israely/Palestinian conflict. For 30-odd seconds every few scenes, a few trite words are exchanged on the issue, which are ultimately offensive to both sides. Like the decision to dub, it's a self-defeating narrative gambit, and it's hard to comprehend the thinking behind it in a romantic comedy.

The sense of discomfort these scenes deliver infects the rest of the film, as does that impenetrable block of dreadful dubbing. That's a shame because there's a decent love story at the heart of *I Can't Think Straight* that would stand on its own if only it was allowed to. **Jon Williams**

Anticipation. What a clever title ❶

Enjoyment. There's some real romance in among the dubbed nonsense ❷

In Retrospect. Just not worth the effort. ❶

FIFTY DEAD MEN WALKING

DIRECTED BY Kari Skogland
STARRING Ben Kingsley, Jim Sturgess, Rose McGowan



Despite the still-smouldering political context (the Northern Ireland Troubles), despite the charismatic lead performance from Jim Sturgess, and erratic but watchable support from Ben Kingsley, and even despite the grimly compelling source material from Republican informer Martin McGartland (on whose book the film is based), despite it all, *Fifty Dead Men Walking* just doesn't work.

It hits crisis point midway through the second act. By then we've seen cheeky Belfast chappy McGartland, as played by Sturgess, facing off against the occupying British forces and wooing the local ladies (step forward Nathalie Press as Lara) with equal gusto. He falls in with the neighbourhood Provos, but is soon recruited by a Special Branch honcho codenamed Fergus (Kingsley) to inform on his terrorist brethren. Naturally before you can say 'deep cover', Martin is in deep shit.

And yet unlike the protagonists of other deep cover staples (*Donnie Brasco*, *The Departed*, *Traitor*), Martin acts without heroic motive. He is ideologically nationalist and a self-declared hater of the Brits. Yet he informs. For what? For money of course. The movie being a movie, hates this. It tries instead to make Martin excessively charismatic, to distract us from his grubby reality and his dramatic inertia.

Everyone he meets – men and women – swoons (in one hilarious scene, some Libyan arms dealers instead of kicking him to death submit to his charm). By Act Three, the film drops all pretence of caring, and simply throws the thriller handbook at the screen – including a harrowing supporting role for Rose McGowan (playing an IRA Mata Hari called Grace) and a bullet ridden car chase that features an ambulance and a machine gun. Piffle. **Kevin Maher**

Anticipation. Great festival buzz. Finally the truth about The Troubles ❶

Enjoyment. A slow slide into the bog of cliché formula and disappointment. ❷

In Retrospect. So many chances wasted ❶



HUSH

DIRECTED BY Mark Tonderai
STARRING Will Ash, Christine Bottomley, Andreas Wisniewski

Warp Films are making a name for themselves backing edgy projects, but they need to do better than *Hush*. When his girlfriend Beth (Christine Bottomley) is snatched by a hooded truck driver it's up to Zakes (Will Ash) to man up and save the day. It's an intriguing premise that touches on personal responsibility and the menace of ordinary locations, but Tonderai is unable to see it through. His fussy direction is distracting, but then perhaps he realised that in Will Ash he's lumbered with a leading man who does his best work when his mouth is closed. Worse, *Hush* offends various rules of logic under the guise of suspending disbelief – a weakness that undermines its impressive nasty streak and a great twist at the half way point. In a crowded genre, it simply has nothing new to offer. **Matt Bochenski**



MARLEY & ME

DIRECTED BY David Frankel
STARRING Owen Wilson, Jennifer Aniston, Alan Arkin

***Marley & Me* would have made such a great GAP advert were it not** for that pesky 'character giving' nose of Owen Wilson's. No doubt the casting directors thought he'd add a bit of indie credibility to a film that's otherwise sickeningly picture perfect. With Jennifer Aniston co-starring as Wilson's perfect new wife. Mr and Mrs Grogan start out married life in perfectly sunny Florida as the world's most optimistically paid rookie journalists. If their succession of increasingly mansion-like love nests is anything to go by. It's all perfect until loveable Labrador pup Marley comes into their life and starts crapping all over their soft furnishings and humping people's legs. If its December 25 US release date signified anything, it's that some dogs really are just for Christmas. **Ellen E Jones**



WONDERFUL TOWN

DIRECTED BY Aditya Assarat
STARRING Anchalee Saisoontorn, Supphasit Kansen, Dul Yeambunying

Residents of Takua Pa in south Thailand are still suffering the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. While the practicalities of rebuilding are straightforward, there's no apparent solution for curing the hostile depression haunting the town. The arrival of young architect Ton (Anchalee Saisoontorn) brings the threat of new life into Takua Pa. Visiting a work project, he strikes up a love affair with hotel owner Na (Supphasit Kansen), but their romance becomes a source of resentment for those who cannot move on with their own lives. Shunning the simplistic motif of camaraderie in the face of adversity *Wonderful Town* explores all angles of human behaviour. Aditya Assarat's direction is delicate and beautifully observed, and the result is a poignant snapshot of a wounded community. **Ailsa Caine**



GUN CRAZY

DIRECTED BY Joseph H Lewis
STARRING John Dall, Peggy Cummins, Berry Kroeger

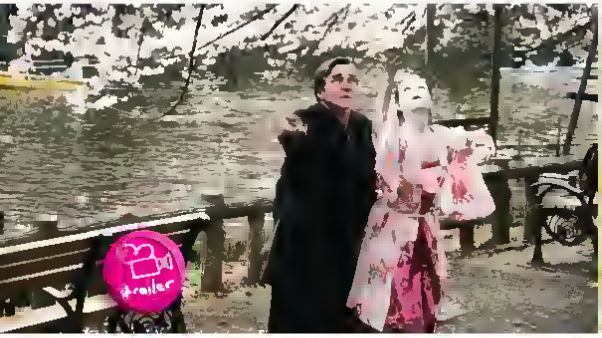
Bart (John Dall) and Laurie (Peggy Cummins) love guns. But Bart has no interest in killing. Laurie, on the other hand, in her yearning for ultraviolent excitement, is alarmingly trigger-happy. Bart proposes and Laurie accepts, but when the money runs dry she persuades Bart that they should become partners in crime and a rampage ensues. Epitomising the B film noir alongside Edgar G Ulmer's 1945 *Detour*, Joseph H Lewis's *Gun Crazy* (originally released in 1950) is also one of the great cult movies in American cinema history. A major influence on both *Bonnie and Clyde* and the French New Wave (with Godard a particular admirer), it's a film that far transcends its low budget constraints. **Jason Wood**



EVERLASTING MOMENTS

DIRECTED BY Jan Troell
STARRING Maria Heiskanen, Mikael Persbrandt, Jesper Christensen

Set in Sweden in the early 1900s, Jan Troell's *Everlasting Moments* tells the story of Maria, a working class woman who wins a camera in a lottery. It changes her life – enabling her to meet photographer Sebastian Federsen and discover a love of taking pictures. As Maria's talent develops so does her strength of character. Battling with an abusive husband, she takes solace in her photographs and her developing friendship with Sebastian. Despite her constraints as a woman in the early twentieth century, she builds a part-time career as a photographer. *Everlasting Moments* is both a gentle and brutal story as Troell explores the frustrations of working class life through the camera's lens. With moments of charm punctuating the often-harsh narrative, it manages to be both weighty and playful in equal measure. **Ailsa Caine**



CHERRY BLOSSOMS

DIRECTED BY Doris Dörrie
STARRING Elmira Wiesner, Hannelore Elsner, Aya Irizuki

So-called for the Japanese symbol of beauty and impermanence, *Cherry Blossoms* is a film suffused with sadness. Indebted to Ozu's *Tokyo Story*, and enthralled by Japanese culture as a symbol of elusive happiness, it follows an elderly Bavarian couple whose visit to their children dredges up the insecurities and selfishness of childhood. A cruel twist (maybe too cruel) sends the film in a new direction – to Japan itself, a devotional pilgrimage to reclaim and reconnect with something that has been forever lost. There are moments of absolute heartbreak in *Cherry Blossoms* but the visual economy of the film's first half disappears in its second. Doris Dörrie's camera meanders around Tokyo, mimicking the dislocation of her characters, but dragging the film beyond what feels like its natural length. **Matt Bochenski**



KATYN

DIRECTED BY Andrzej Wajda
STARRING Artur Zmijewski, Maja Ostaszewska, Andrzej Chyra

After Hungary's *Children of Glory* and Estonia's *The Singing Revolution* comes another film that throws off the shackles of Soviet occupation to tell its own story in its own words. In 1940, 12 000 Polish officers were murdered by the Red Army in the forest of Katyn – a massacre that the Kremlin later tried to blame on the Nazis. The pain and injustice of this experience lingers in every frame, as Anna (Maja Ostaszewska) waits years for news of her husband while a cynical game of politics unfolds. Never knowingly understated, Wajda employs a range of sweeping shots and orchestral cues to ramp up the emotion, occasionally sacrificing intimacy for the grander narrative of history. But this remains a brutal story (interestingly one absent of Jews) that builds to a shocking climax. **Matt Bochenski**



THE BURNING PLAIN

DIRECTED BY Guillermo Arriaga
STARRING Charlize Theron, Kim Basinger, Jennifer Lawrence

Vast, impassive landscapes, intersecting storylines and deliberately washed out visuals – much of Guillermo Arriaga's directorial debut will be familiar from his screenwriting work with Alejandro González Iñarritu. Arriaga's fascination with how lives interconnect remains – *The Burning Plain* serves up actions, causes and consequences for simultaneous observation. His worldview is a biblical one: the sins of the father are visited on Santiago (JD Pardo). Sylvia (Charlize Theron) discovers the redemptive power of love; and Gina (Kim Basinger) is literally consumed by the flames of her desire. The occasionally pompous tone will no doubt irritate some yet a naturalistic shooting style and great performances from both Theron and Basinger save it from slipping into melodrama. **Ellen E Jones**


Chapter Five
In which we discuss the medium of film in its many mesmerising forms

THE BACK SECTION 22



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVIE GEE



LW LIES WATCHMEN EXCLUSIVE

MAN BEHIND THE MASKS

HOW DO YOU FILM THE UNFILMABLE? MAKE IT VIOLENT, SEXUAL AND AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, SAYS WATCHMEN DIRECTOR ZACK SNYDER.

WORDS BY JONATHAN CROCKER

The walls of Zack Snyder's LA office are draped with *300* posters. You can't blame him. The *Watchmen* director's Spartan battle royale was the movie that made Hollywood's new golden boy. In a merciless surprise attack in 2007 it destroyed box-office records for the biggest March opening weekend and set an IMAX record that would only be broken by *The Dark Knight*.

It was gorgeous, emotional and very, very violent. But there was something else about *300* that got people excited. Something in one of its trailers. A barely visible flash-cut of a man wearing a trenchcoat and an ink-blotted mask. Snyder's wife and producer bet him $100 that no one would discover his Rorschach test.

By the time *300* began harbinging at the box-office, Snyder was $100 better off and already secretly preparing to attempt the movie that had stumped everyone from Terry Gilliam to Paul Greengrass. The fact that it was another comic-book adaptation didn't bother him. But then this, of course, wasn't just another comic-book. "If anything, my hesitation was with regard to the project itself, how awesome and huge it was," he says. He likens the task to making *Moby Dick* into a movie, but didn't it bother him that this whale had swallowed every filmmaker who'd tried to catch it? "Only after I had gotten into it and said I would do it, did we really start to think about that," he reveals. "I don't think I really gave a lot of thought to why it hadn't worked in the past. Maybe if I had I'd be like, Oh, forget it!"

He got a reminder of *Watchmen*'s three-decade stay in development hell when it came to agreeing a budget for his superhero epic. "Because of all the other versions of the movie they've tried, it had a lot of the costs already on it when I got it," he explains. "That money doesn't go away. 'Oh, we didn't make it! Oh, great! We're back to zero!' It doesn't work like that. I get it and I'm like, What? I gotta pay all these other guys?'" How much? Rumours say the budget alone was $150 million. Snyder takes a sip of water and smiles. "I won't say. But it was enough. I could make another movie. We made an insanely ambitious film, even for the exorbitant cost of the movie."

But Snyder wasn't holding back. By going full tilt on sex, violence and thematic payload, the writer/director has set out to change the comic-book movie in the same way that Alan Moore's novel ripped up the rule-book for its ink and paper counterpart. He used *Taxi Driver* and *Se7en* as visual reference points. We're betting Sam Raimi didn't. "It's my attempt to make a superhero movie with consequences. These guys are having compound fractures. The bad guys die. The rape scene is really uncomfortable... Not to mention the fact that they're in these super nostalgic, pretty naive costumes. That really, to me, is a loss of innocence. And it's all about that."

Unsurprisingly, the studio thought it was about something else. Like big stars. Happy endings. Like PG-13. "When I first started working on it, it was absolutely supposed to be PG-13," he remembers. Then Snyder showed them the footage. "The studio was like 'Uuuuuh, how am I supposed to feel about The Comedian? Is he a good guy? Because he's shooting a pregnant woman in this scene and raping this woman in that scene. What? You have him killing frickin' Kennedy in the title sequence!' *The Dark Knight* helped, but it's still... Well, cutting it down would make them happy."

But *300*'s record box-office takings from a modest $60 million budget gave Snyder power. The studio wanted 115 minutes. Snyder's first cut of the film was three hours. Then he shot some more – an *Animatrix*-style animated meta-comic, *Tales of the Black Freighter*, voiced by Gerard Butler. The final theatrical cut clocked in at two hours 40 minutes. With murder attempted rape and JFK's brains all over the title sequence, Snyder expects that the DVD will run to three hours and 25 minutes.

That, says Snyder, is how you film the unfilmable novel. Do it faithfully. Keep the things that others would cut out. "The Comedian's funeral, Dr Manhattan on Mars, Rorschach with the psychiatrist... That's why I wanted to make the movie. Are there things in the graphic novel that are unfilmable? Absolutely. Because it's a whole different thing. It is not my intent to replace the graphic novel. I'm a comic-book fan. I'm not going to say I'm not. If I've made a two-and-a-half hour advertisement for the graphic novel, then I've done my job."

UNMASKING THE WATCHMEN

THE SUPERMEN REVEAL THEIR SECRETS... INTERVIEWS BY JONATHAN CROCKER

LWLIES WATCHMEN EXCLUSIVE



JEFFREY DEAN MORGAN

THE COMEDIAN

"The funny thing – well, not so funny – was that I somehow sympathised with The Comedian, which I found very odd given the atrocities he commits. So as an actor, it's a tremendous challenge to attempt to rape a woman, shoot a pregnant woman and various other misdeeds and yet humanise him to the point where the audience can sympathise with him. I've spent my life playing Denny in *Grey's Anatomy* or *PS I Love You*. So when I went in and read, I added the F-word to the script about 20 times. Zack was like, 'You're the guy! Are you the guy?' I was like, 'I'm the guy!' But people constantly say, 'I didn't know Robert Downey Jr was in *Watchmen*.' God, people!"



PATRICK WILSON

NITE OWL II

"Having this comic, I loved being able to see physically what Nite Owl did. His expressions, how he holds his arms or his posture. My fighting style is heavy-handed, close-fisted and power-co-ordinated. I think all the fight choreography is unbelievable, but it's all very specific to the character. And he's a very human character, out of shape, impotent, wants to go after a girl that's still in a relationship with a guy. Our first day in the suits was the scene we break Rorschach out of prison. Jackie Earle Haley and I just sort of looked at each other and laughed. Because this was like *Little Children 2*, where Brad Adamson and Ronnie McGorvey went on to become superheroes!"



BILLY CRUDUP

DR MANHATTAN

"It's one of the interesting things that Alan Moore does in my estimation: to subvert the idea of the superhero to say, 'This is what would really happen to a human with this kind of power.' He would become disinterested in humanity. And I think that was part of what Dr M suffers from: that level of isolation and loneliness that came from him having all the power in the world. I wore white pyjamas that had blue LEDs. I was basically a lighting instrument for the other actors. And then I had 140 dots on my face. I didn't look like *that* which is this six-foot four-inches, well hung, huge master of matter."



JACKIE EARLE HALEY

RORSCHACH

"I remember the day the CG guys said, 'Hey, we got the first blot-test for Rorschach's mask.' And it was like, 'Whoa!' Rorschach is such an iconic character. Such a twisted fuck, but in a weird, admirable way. It's hard to describe. Hopefully this guy doesn't walk the planet, you know what I mean? But he's a wonderful, thought-provoking character. He's a lesson of what we don't want in society. I kinda went quasi-berserk, just being alone out there in Vancouver six months, studying this guy constantly. I started talking to myself. It's weird. That's all I can say. I never hold on to characters, but this guy has forced that door open."



MATTHEW GOODE

OZYMANDIAS

"I don't know why Zack bothered casting me in some ways. Because I'm not 40-years-old, I don't look anything like the character, I'm not blond, I'm not built like a fucking tank, I'm not particularly smart, I'm not particularly quick and I can't catch a bullet. So we're asking a lot from the audience! He's not a particularly nice man. But I suppose that's what Alan Moore was doing, saying that people who dress up in costumes and go out and fight people are more likely to be sociopathic themselves. But I've always liked Ozymandias. And definitely Jude [Law] did too because when I got there all the artwork still had his head on it!"



DVD SYMPHONY

CONDUCTED BY
GEORGIE HOBBS



THE ORIGINAL BARFLY

REMEMBERING PUNCH-DRUNK POET CHARLES BUKOWSKI.

With his scarred face languorous delivery and fondness for booze the late German-American writer Charles Bukowski perfected a template for the skid row lowlife. Some might consider him a Beat poet but he doesn't quite fit with the expansive *joie de vivre* of it all. While Kerouac went out on the road to seek enlightenment, Bukowski left home because there was no place else to go.

He stayed in motels and flophouses. Drank alone with the blinds pulled down while Beethoven and Brahms blasted out of a transistor radio. In Philadelphia he spent two-and-a-half years in a bar fighting the landlord and running errands in exchange for free beer. Yet with a bit of help from John Fante the novelist who gave him his plain talkin' style he defined the American underclass in his novels and poems as he set about putting his experiences down on paper.

Bukowski's Los Angeles could be seen as the inverse companion of David Lynch's. While the movies are surreal explorations of the darkness behind the scenes of LA's rich Bukowski breathed beer-stained life into autobiographical stories about the nobodies who posted their mail and packaged their meat in warehouses. Yet during the 80s he befriended the Hollywood elite working on the film *Barfly*, hanging out with Sean Penn and Madonna writing a book based on his experiences *Hollywood*. He had contempt for the fakes once telling the future Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger that he was "a piece of shit."

He was flawed he womanised he gambled he drank – a lot. His fondness for the bottle came he said to avoid committing suicide. Throughout his life the abiding influence on his writing was the incredible cruelty he suffered as a child. His father converted the family bathroom into a torture chamber in which he would belt him until welts and bruises covered the young Bukowski's body, his mother looking on. Consequently his writing embodied his disgust with hollow men who like his father exerted power over those below them because they could.

Inflated pride thrives on cheap brutality and Bukowski knew it. But for all his nihilism he was never cruel just honest. Today in London streets that reek of LA ersatz-ness we could all do with a bit more of that. **TIM MATHEWS**

Bukowski: Born Into This, directed by John Dullaghan, is out now on DVD.

ON THE LINE

WALTER SALLES

Poor Walter Salles. It must be hard to create a positive image of Brazilian youth when the likes of *City of God* and *Elite Squad* insist on painting only one picture of life in South America's biggest nation. For a misguided few, Brazilian cinema is all about the extreme poverty and violence that plague the inner city *favelas*. It's no surprise, then, that Salles makes a conscious decision to steer clear of the stereotypes, and focuses on narrative, character and landscape.

And even though he's far too nice to criticise anyone who's jumped on the bandwagon created by Fernando Meirelles (a nice, in fact: he arrives 20 minutes early and only breaks eye contact to take a sip of mineral water), the gun toting machismo of recent Brazilian hits is clearly on his mind. "What Fernando Meirelles did with *City of God* was extremely important because he showed a reality that most Brazilians were unaware of," says Salles. "He did a film on urban warfare that was not on TV or in newspapers and suddenly it hit the screen and it was a shock for all of us."

A shock at the time, but favela chic is normal practice now. So normal in fact that during screenings of Golden Bear winner *Elite Squad*, scenes of unpunished police brutality were actually cheered by audiences, prompting one writer from *Variety* to call the film a one-note celebration of violence-for-good that plays like a recruitment film for fascist thugs.

Linha de Passe is different. Reuniting Salles with writer Daniela Thomas, it tells a part made in 1995 (just before the pair co-wrote and directed *Terra Estrangeira*) to get back together regularly and take a look at Brazil's younger generation. "Brazil is still a country in the making and stories come to the surface almost on an everyday basis. The difficulty we have is to actually react with the story that we tell and also to actually be able to understand how credible they are," he says.

Salles was lured away from Brazilian cinema for the 2005 Hollywood remake of *Dark Water*, and while he won't go as far as calling this experience a negative one, he does admit that losing creative control of his films is painful. "Film is such a hard endeavour from an emotional and physical standpoint," he says. "You give two years of your life to something that is very dear to you, and you have to be obsessive about it in order to get to the end."

His next project is a possible adaptation of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*, produced with Francis Ford Coppola's backing. He's adamant that he'll have the final cut on this one, stating it's "the only way to go."

With such strong conviction about the state of Brazilian cinema along with the desire to make pictures with a social and political resonance, it seems that we shouldn't expect Salles to make another ripped off J-horror torn to pieces by Hollywood hacks. Even if he's too nice to say so. **EDWARD SAUT**

Linha de Passe is released on DVD and Blu-ray on March 3.
The full transcript of this interview is online now.











LISTINGS





WORDS: [illegible] EMILY MORTIMER
HENRY GOLDING [illegible] MATT BUCK
KAT HALSTEAD PAUL HANFORD GEORGIE ROBB
SIMON MERCER REBECCA RIBICHINI

AVAILABLE MARCH 2

TRANSSIBERIAN

A missionary couple (Woody Harrelson Emily Mortimer) become embroiled in a shady world of corruption violence guilt and deceit after meeting a pair of drug runners on the famous Beijing-to-Moscow train route

WISE BLOOD

This neglected film is Southern Gothic at its best and a must for all Huston fans since this is its delayed DVD debut Extras include interviews with actors Amy Wright and Brad Dourif as well as writers Michael and Benedict Fitzgerald

JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE BOX SET

Nine bad heist-ers but where is *Le Samourai*? Beloved of French New Wave fans cult director Jean-Pierre Melville made moody films whose super-fast zooms and camera trickery don't half look dated now

AVAILABLE MARCH 9

GENERATION KILL

How do you follow up The Greatest TV Show of All Time*? Easy make one that's even better *The Wire* duo David Simon and Ed Burns have followed up their cop masterclass with this blistering epic and brilliant series about a platoon of Recon Marines spearheading the invasion of Iraq in 2003 You have to see it to believe how good TV can be

REPO! THE GENETIC OPERA

From the visionary who brought you the *Saw* sequels (not the original mind) comes this straight-to-DVD effort about a biotech company that offers organ transplants for a price Not to be confused with Alex Cox's genuinely provocative 1984 *Repo Man*

BOYS ON FILM I: HARD LOVE

The aptly named Peccadillo Pictures are releasing this collection of nine international short films that take a multi angled approach to contemporary gay lifestyles This is the first ever compilation of gay shorts in the UK

AVAILABLE MARCH 16

FRESA Y CHOCOLATE

Two radically different men from Havana – an apolitical gay artist and a fiercely homophobic communist – overcome their mutual suspicion to form a lasting if challenging friendship Took home the Special Jury Prize at Sundance in 1995 Fourteen years on you can still see why

4:30

Shot through with green light and the incidental noise of crickets chirruping Royston Tan beautifully captures the peace and loneliness of Xiao Wu (Xiao Li Yuan) a young boy under the unreliable watch of a suicidal alcoholic whom he idolises

THE DUCHESS

Total heartbreak from start to finish this generally repellent Keira Knightley gives a career defining performance as Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire while *Bullet Boy*'s Saul Dibb surprised those who'd pegged him as a director of urban Brit-flicks alone

L'ANTICRISTO

Italian maestro Ennio Morricone lays on the soundtrack for this silly yet madishly kitsch, Italian possession horror starring Carlo Grevina as a one-time witch turned man slayer in need of an exorcism The subtext runs deep

AVAILABLE MARCH 23

AN EMPRESS AND THE WARRIORS

Take an unlikely romance dress it in a martial arts epic and stab at it with cheeky humour and you've got Asian singer/actress Kelly Chen starring as a feisty princess who must choose between love and duty when she suddenly finds herself Empress

AÑO UÑA

Stylistically influenced by Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, Jonas Cuerón's debut is made entirely from still photos snapped from his real life laced togetherby a fictional narrative

ZACK AND MIRI MAKE A PORNO

The latest let-down from Kevin Smith stars Seth Rogen as Zack and Elizabeth Banks as Miri and it does exactly what it says on the tin. Sex an tape with laughs, just not enough. EH

AVAILABLE MARCH 30

THE OUTSIDER

Tyson director James Toback is the subject of this documentary by Nicholas Jarecki filmed on the set of Toback's *When Will I Be Loved* in 2004. This is indie filmmaking laid bare. MH

A TIME TO LOVE AND A TIME TO DIE

This unique World War II movie set in the bombed-out ruin of Berlin brought Sirk international acclaim. Based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque, it follows a soldier who reunites with an old friend as they try to survive the horrors of war. MH

OF TIME AND THE CITY

The Scouse director's elegiac essay to his hometown is a time capsule of stunning imagery pieced together with Davies's own intimate narration and contemporary footage. Reminiscent of Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg*, this is a dreamy love letter of a film. MH

HEAVY LOAD

This is a classic rockumentary: an anarchic, outrageous examination of the spirit of punk. That it's set amongst day-care centres and social workers is because the band Heavy Load, is comprised of people with learning disabilities (*see picture, inset*) on a mission to reclaim the mainstream. MH

AVAILABLE APRIL 6

THE CORNER

After writing *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, but before he turned it into epic cop drama *The Wire*, David Simon warmed up to the task by writing about a black family in the thick of things on a Baltimore drug corner. That became this series directed by local boy Charles Dutton and it's full of fascinating counterpoints to its more acclaimed successor. MH

SUPER HIGH ME

This docu-comedy for people who think 'Anyone here smoke weed?' is a sharp one liner opes Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me*. Stand-up comedian Doug Benson smokes marijuana for 30 days to see the effects, but direction, purpose and analysis get lost somewhere in a cloud of 'Sorry. What were we saying? Um, got any munchies?' MH



THE BÉLA TARR COLLECTION

Laugh-a-minute Hungarian Béla Tarr receives a daunting DVD collection comprising *Damnation* (1988), the epic *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000) and his latest glacial period anti-thriller *The Man From London* (2007), which split opinion on its recent release. The lack of *Sátántangó* is an odd oversight though. MH

AVAILABLE APRIL 13

RED RIDING TRILOGY

Expectations are justifiably high for Channel 4's new trilogy of films based on David Peace's cult Yorkshire Ripper trilogy: something like a grimy Northern *Chinatown* with Paddy Considine, David Morrissey and Andrew Garfield (remember the name: this kid could be huge) tackling the police corruption at the heart of a bungled investigation. PH

LADY IN WHITE

Fresh from his success as the titular star of *Witness*, Lukas Haas played a young boy terrorised by visions of child murder in this 1988 thriller. Legend has it that director Frank LaLoggia convinced Haas that his mum was dead to prepare him for a crucial scene so the least we can do is be supportive. MH

EVERYBODY WINS

Czech director Karel Reisz only made two more films for cinema in the 21 years after *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the last of which was this PI thriller written by Arthur Miller. Nick Nolte is effective in the lead role, but it's a disappointing way for Reisz to bow out. MH

AVAILABLE APRIL 25

THE EXTERMINATING ANGELS

Continuing Brisseau's taboo-shattering trilogy of films exploring society's sexual mores. This second part follows a film director holding a series of outre auditions for a project about female pleasure. MH

AVAILABLE APRIL 27

EALING CLASSICS

The oldest studio in England has more than its fair share of classics to boast of. This box-set collects *My Learned Friend* (1943), a story of murder and madness; *For Those In Peril* (1944), a World War II drama; and *Trouble Brewing* (1939), a crime thriller. MH

THE SMALL BACK ROOM

Where most war movies in the 1940s were jingoistic affairs full of patriotism and propaganda, Powell and Pressburger were doing something else altogether. This is the startling story of an alcoholic bomb disposal expert pushed to the limit. Save it for a double bill with Kathryn Bigelow's upcoming *The Hurt Locker*. MH

SHANGHAI TRIAD

Chinese maestro Zhang Yimou's back catalogue continues to leak out onto DVD. Once again he teams up with Gong Li this time for a predictably sumptuous story of gang wars and forbidden love in 1930s Shanghai. MH

GUESS WHO'S BACK...

STEPHAN ELLIOTT

Stephan Elliott, director of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *Welcome to Woop Woop*, has been out of action for nearly a decade following a skiing accident. But his latest film, *Easy Virtue*, a sly adaptation of a Noel Coward play released on DVD on March 16, is his shot at reclaiming former glory.

LWLies: How has your return to the director's chair been? Do you feel more mature after your break?
Elliott: Mature? Oh no! Not at all! I just wanted to eat my life, chew it up, spit it out and get on with it. I completely forgot about the hard parts of filmmaking.

LWLies: Is it true that you are quite firm with your cast and crew?
Elliott: When you have problems with actors or crew complaining about trailers being in the wrong place and stuff like that, you learn how to do a lot of ego coaxing. But this time I wasn't taking any of it, absolutely none. If they start complaining I will completely say, 'Look, we are so lucky to be doing this for a living, would you just be a little bit more thankful and get on with it?'

LWLies: What drew you to *Easy Virtue*?
Elliott: I didn't want to do it. I don't like period dramas: they make me feel like I'm walking through a museum. When Ealing Studios brought it to me, I said 'No!' But they insisted, so I said, 'You know what, let's try it, but I wanted to do it differently. I think that we really rock n' rolled it up.

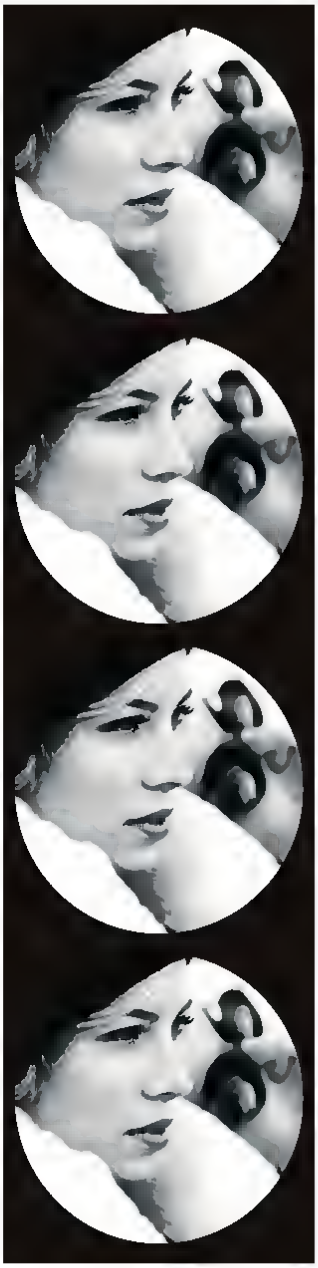
LWLies: Are there similarities between the America and Britain of today, and in the 1920s?
Elliott: It's terrifyingly similar. There was a big wave of anti-Americanism going on and the world's biggest recession was about to hit, and that's happening right now. Coward originally wrote Mr Whittaker [Colin Firth] as a Martini and cigarette character, speaking very stiffly. We wrote Mr Whittaker as a man who had returned from the war with little left in his village, and that's pretty deep and scary stuff.

LWLies: How did you balance the humour in the film with the deeper messages?
Elliott: I think if we got the balance right, then we would have really pulled something off. Because the laughs were just easy laughs and the darkness was too miserable. So we've done an interesting melt and a quite successful one, I think.

LWLies: Is comedy something you find easy to create?
Elliott: Most people say comedy is the most difficult thing in the world, but I find drama the most difficult. That's a challenge for me. The comedy side comes pretty naturally.

LWLies: And how was it working with Jessica Biel?
Elliott: She's got the most photographable bum on the planet. But the fact that she can walk into a room and take people's breath away... I think she hates it sometimes because underneath there is a very smart, funny and loveable comedienne. This is one hell of a knock on the door for her, she's gonna be offered proper roles now. SUSANNA PINATO

Check out the full transcript of this interview on the week of the DVD release.



JOHNNY COLLECTION 1993-2002



DIRECTED BY LASSE HALLSTRÖM, EMIR KOSTURICA, TIM BURTON, JIM JARMUSCH, KEITH FULTON, LOUIS PEPE AVAILABLE NOW

You'd have to be high on a special blend of coke, heroin and nostalgia to produce a box set as sloppily put together as this. You'd have to be pretty far gone not to even consider stuff like 'extras' or 'thematic consistency' and to think that shucking in a period piece, a cult doc and a Jarmusch would have a broad enough appeal to translate into commercial returns.

Obviously someone as undeniably handsome as Johnny Depp is going to get people excited, be it a housewife hooked on Jack Sparrow or a Tim Burton goth chick. Now a France-based father of two with a penchant for hammy accents, Depp was, for many, the dark-eyed poster boy for the live-fast-die-young LA set.

Yes, he will forever have a special place in the hearts of twenty-somethings nonsed to the '90s. Back then, Johnny part-owned The Viper Room in West Hollywood's fatal Sunset Strip. Sure, it all turned horribly sour when River Phoenix's death simultaneously introduced the masses to and scared us away from, the 'speedball' (the heroin and coke cocktail *du jour*) on that fateful Halloween of 1993, but it didn't cull the Viper Room's – or Johnny's – caché.

Depp sold up in 2004 (it's now the haunt of The Pussycat Dolls) just around the time he became Jack Sparrow, in fact. But, like Optimum's odd collection, we'll gloss over Depp's later films in favour of the rag-tag odds and ends they've selected for us.

It kicks off with three solidly kooky classics: Emir Kusturica's *Arizona Dream* (1993), Lasse Hallström's *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993) and Jim Jarmusch's black-and-white art-western, *Dead Man* (1995).

So far so good, but despite Tim Burton's esoteric charm, the inclusion of 1999's *Sleepy Hollow* acts more as a screen test for all the British-accented death-tainted eccentrics Depp would go on to play than the kook-fest we want. What's it doing here? The distinctly niche Terry Gilliam doc *Lost In La Mancha* (2002) is the only disc to include extras; a great interview with Gilliam and Mark Kermode. Centred around Gilliam's failure to adapt *Don Quixote*, it features a long-haired Depp only as a peripheral player. Fans will note the close-ups of his hilarious 'Winn Forever' tattoo and his black Viper Room branded beanie hat. It makes for a wonderful finale, but it's hard to imagine an audience clamouring for it.

Perhaps that's the danger of grouping films around an actor as opposed to a director: cohesion is not only unlikely but probably unwanted. Nobody wants to see Depp entirely in Victorian costume or in pirate garb; even the grunge pin-up look (Cobain hair and ripped jeans) seen in *Arizona Dream* and *Gilbert Grape* can wear thin. Just... GEORGE ROBBS

NEVER WORKED OUT WHAT ATE GILBERT GRAPE? CHECK OUT THESEDEPP-RELATED FLICKS INSTEAD.

HEATHERS 1988

PMT-laced horror-rom-com. Depp dated star Winona Ryder, just after *Heathers* wrapped... foolishly tattooing 'Winona Forever' on his arm following their curt engagement. It now reads Wino Forever.

CRY-BABY 1990

Bar the sheer good luck that was Ricki Lake in *Hairspray*, John Waters has never made a more commercial move than casting 27-year-old Depp as the eponymous heartthrob in this prison-break musical.

EDWARD SCISSORHANDS 1990

Avon calling! Beautiful fairytale that'll never get old. Depp, Burton and Ryder at their most tender.

FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS 1998 AND GONZO 2008

Just think about it, wouldn't this make a nice duo?



THE ARCHIVE



THE SECOND IN OUR SERIES OF RETROSPECTIVES ON CLASSIC FILMS AND CURIOSITIES THAT HAVE BEEN AROUND EVEN LONGER THAN WE HAVE.

WORDS BY JASON WOOD
ILLUSTRATION BY STEVIE GEE

Finally made available on DVD for the first time in the UK, Chris Petit's *Radio On* ranks alongside *Performance* (Donald Cammell 1970) as one of the most striking feature debuts in British cinema. A haunting synthesis of road movie and thriller – with added existential overtones – Petit's film reflects a number of the director's fascinations. Most pronounced is the interest in the mythology of freedom in the climate of annul despair and uncertainty threatening to suffocate late 1970s Britain. With Low and *Heroes*-era Bowie dominating the soundtrack, music also features highly as does an interest in all things automative.

Previously the film editor at *Time Out*, Petit saw nothing on the English screen that corresponded to a modern life that for him combined "drift and boredom". *Alphaville*, JG Ballard and Kraftwerk". An admirer of Monte Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop* and Peckinpah's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, Petit began to wonder why a British film couldn't explore the enduring theme of migration while presenting contemporary England as a cinematic landscape.

Similarly enthralled by the austere aesthetic of Bresson, Straub and Rossellini it was the films of Wim Wenders with their bored conflicted heroes and endless autobahns that indicated that a way of actually making films might be possible. Possibility became reality when the German director responded to Petit's overtures and became his executive producer. Petit had to audition for the privilege and when asked by Wenders how he intended to shoot the film – a pertinent question to put to someone who had never made a film before – he responded quite simply, "Black-and-white 35mm". The answer obviously proved conclusive.

Minimalist in plot, *Radio On* follows a young man (a suitably distant David Beames who, onscreen, is given the best haircut in movie history) as he travels by car to Bristol to investigate the death in mysterious circumstances of his brother. So far so *Get Carter*. As the man drives, he encounters figures as rootless as himself: a soldier deserting from duty in Northern Ireland; a German woman (Lisa Kreuzer on loan from Wenders) looking for her lost child

RADIO ON 1980



and a rural rock n' roll-loving garage mechanic with a penchant for Eddie Cochran and dreams of stardom. The mechanic is an early and surprisingly effective Sting, the effectiveness of his performance attributable to the fact that he sings rather than acts. Stunningly photographed in luminous monochrome by another Wenders regular, Robby Muller's assistant Martin Schafer, the film offers a mythic and compelling vision of a British landscape stricken by economic decline and stalled between failed hopes of cultural and social change, and the upheavals of Thatcherism.

Petit, who has subsequently carved out a simultaneous career as a novelist, has eloquently written of his love of driving and music, citing the portable radio cassette as one of the greatest inventions of the twentieth century and the in car stereo as the means by which the dreary reality of Britain could be transcended. Tapping into the connection between music and motion, *Radio On* incorporates the device of radio bulletins to foreground the political climate. Moreover, it is simply a great jukebox movie, effectively utilising the new wave sounds of Bowie, Robert Fripp, Kraftwerk and Devo.

Working with a meagre budget – the film was one of the first to be given financial backing from the BFI production board with matching funding coming from Germany – garrulous producer Keith Griffiths managed to persuade then-fledgling label Stiff Records to allow a number of their artists to be used on the soundtrack. Only Elvis Costello demurred.

Despite these pop accoutrements, and despite signposting an audacious new direction for British cinema, this undeniably alien and alienating work that showed little real interest in character or plot (the thriller element of the narrative is quickly abandoned) was met with suspicion and incomprehension on release. A few prominent critics such as Geoffrey Newell Smith stoutly defended it, but the damage was done and *Radio On* slipped from British cinema screens before it had a chance to be truly appreciated.

Later celebrated by Iain Sinclair in *Lights Out For The Territory*, *Radio On* was re-released to an audible fanfare by the British Film Institute in 2004, and was one of the first films to play at Tate Modern. Continually re-assessed, the reputation of Petit's debut reached its apex last year when it was finally released in the UK on DVD (again by the BFI). For those wishing either to re-discover its peculiar delights, or those wishing to sample it for the first time, the DVD edition is not a bad place to start as it incorporates 1988's 24-minute *Radio On (Remix)* project, a digital video essay with radical disruption of the original soundtrack by Wire's Bruce Gilbert.

For a good many years Petit toyed with the idea of making a *Radio On* follow-up before an arid funding climate saw him retreat to esoteric television projects such as *Unrequited Love*. At the time of writing, Petit and Griffiths are collaborating again on a film project purported to be about travel and weather. Details remain sketchy but the sense of anticipation is already building.

CULT HERO



LWLIES SALUTES THE VISIONARIES WHOSE IMAGINATION, PASSION, MADNESS AND GENIUS INSPIRED OUR LOVE OF MOVIES.

NO. 02: ENZO CASTELLARI

WORDS BY PAUL FAIRCLOUGH

On the eve of his seventieth birthday last July *LA Weekly* called Enzo Castellari an Italian drive-in God thus betraying how little they know of a country where a drive-in means a sparsely populated piazza and *I, Vitelloni* projected onto the *passata*-stained vast of the fattest man in the village. The next day the Italian Cultural Institute in Los Angeles threw him a huge birthday party, a measure of the affection he enjoys in his homeland.

Barely known outside Italy it now seems that Castellari will be known as the beneficiary of the latest in a long line of laudable if increasingly random attempts by Quentin Tarantino to prompt a re-examination of popular cinema outside of the US. His remake of Castellari's 1978 World War II western *The Inglorious Bastards* already has the fanboys salivating. But it would be a tragedy if the director becomes known only as Tarantino's latest monkey.

Castellari's film career has spanned 30 years and more than 20 features, all of them kinetic, violent, sentimental and possessed of a bizarre, even juvenile, sense of the absurd. He grew up in the Rome of the 1940s, surrounded by the cinematic legacy of fascism, which provided a rich movie making infrastructure but allowed little in the way of experimentation.

When liberation came and Italian cinema regained its vitality in the 1950s, Castellari, like Sergio Leone, was too busy drinking in the American westerns and gangster flicks flooding the country to pay much attention to the blossoming neo-realist movement shooting on the city's streets. His cinema would be escapist, shamelessly popular and often spectacularly derivative – but it would somehow remain wilfully unmistakeably European.

Make no mistake, Castellari's films are often gimmicky knock-offs of Hollywood blockbusters (what could 1973's *The Marseilles Connection* have been referencing?) and have all the flamboyant panache of a breakfast Sambuca. But having grown up in post-war Italy, Castellari knew how to make a little go a long way – a talent that put him in on the ground floor of several cinematic genres. While none but the most dedicated *Castellarista* would put the director in the same league as Leone or Peckinpah, his early work on the *Django* and *Trinity* series helped create a wholly new cinematic language.

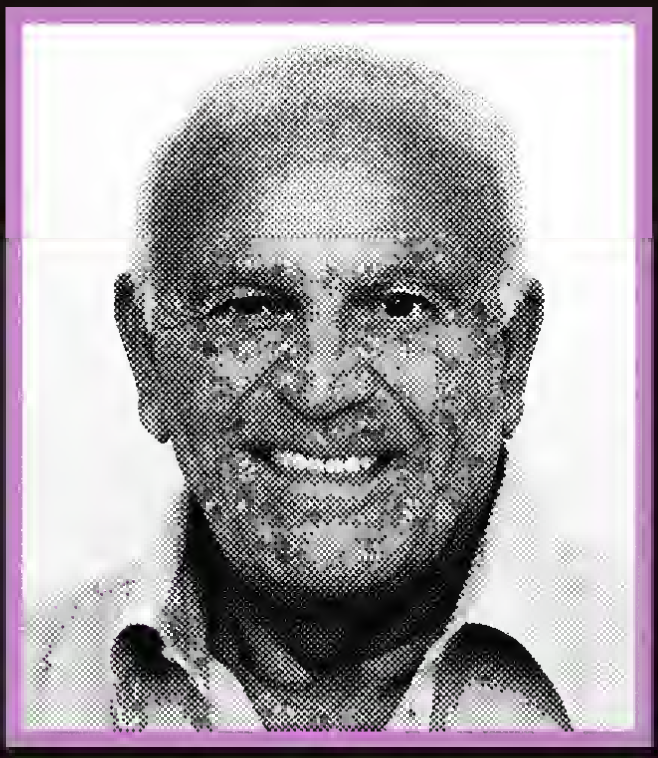
Ever the maverick, however, Castellari was unable to resist indulging his faith in the power of slapstick and shoddy spectacular to rescue otherwise hopelessly misfiring actioners. The director's gleeful willingness to get down with the ridiculous reached its apogee in the jaw dropping 1976 western *Cipolla Colt*, starring an equally enthusiastic Franco Nero as the titular onion farmer fighting Big Railroad's land-grab. Colt fights back in his unique fashion, using the power of his rank onion-breath and eome speeded up action sequences to strike a blow for the little guy, all the while spurred on by thickly Roman accented obscenities from his inexplicably talking horse. Not content with having Nero confound his heroic image, Castellari also cast the sublimely bland Martin Balsam as a tyrannical fascistic railroad boss with a clockwork hand. Critics loved the camped-up Nazi overtones but in fact Castellari's subversion ran deeper: Balsam's character actually referenced a popular liqueur commercial of the time, which itself featured a mechanically enhanced *bon vivaur* ranking the drunken Gestapo vibe.

The director's western career enjoyed a brief resuscitation in the early 1990s when you could make a movie in the former Soviet Union for a clutch of cloned Visa Electrons and some sausages wrapped in newspaper. Unable to pass

up a bargain Castellari took his whole travelling show including regular leading man Nero out East where he helped give birth to the *Eurocht* western with *Jonathan of the Bears* (1993) his own take on *Dances With Wolves* Shot for a piffling £5m the movies extras snaffled a cool £2 50 a day with gin-fizz sweeteners for the huge cast of midgets that went everywhere with the great men. Hundreds of Russian cavalrymen were borrowed from the local barracks to be transformed into the Injun-tusslin US 7th Cavalry by allowing each man a reasonably priced cowboy hat

This was the high water mark of Castellari's adventures in the Leone-meets Looney Tunes world born of the late 60s *Trinity* films But the work he carried off with most aplomb was his series of coarse *policiers* of the '70s most notably the ambitious pair of *The Marseilles Connection* and *The Heroin Busters* (1977) These crime capers are certainly nasty and possessed of the required air of sleaze but they're not exactly *giallo* They kick-started a style of cop thriller that owed more to *The Getaway* and *Bullitt* than to the detective procedurals of the 60s More they seemed to spring from the turbulent streets of the time during the planning of *Marseilles*, commie terrorists The Red Brigades gunned down a police commissioner in Milan an event the director initially worked into the plot

As with his overcooked spaghetti adventures Castellari created something new in the world of the Euro-pudding gangster flicks that reflected the insanity of the real world replete with the stylish theatrical violence being run-out for real by the *Brigate Rosse*, not to mention Rome's very own bad lads of the *Banda della Magliana* who would later get a movie of their own – *Romanzo Criminale* (2005) – that owed not a little to Castellari's legacy



LOST IN TRANSLATION

HOW SOME OF THOSE COLOURFUL CASTELLARI TITLES GOT THE MONOCOQUE TREATMENT

Gli Occhi Freddi Della Paura **(*Cold Eyes of Fear*, 1971) was released as *Desperate Moments***

Cipolla Colt **(*Onion Colt*, 1979) became *Cry! Onion***

Sette Winchester Per Un Massacro **(*Seven Winchesters For A Massacre*, 1968) hit the screens, sadly, as *Renegade Riders***

I Tre Che Sconvolsero Il West – Vado, Vedo e Sparo **(*The Three That Upset The West – I Come, I Saw, I Shot*, 1968) hit the brevity buffer with *Dee Dollar Too Many*.**

And a geeslee improvement..

Quel Maledetto Treno Blindato **(*That Damned Armoured Train*, 1978) was famously re-titled *The Inglorious Bastards***



EX-RENT HELL

HOMEBOY

1988

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL SERESIN
STARRING MICKEY ROURKE CHRISTOPHER WALKEN DEBRA FEUER
BOX NOTABLES ELECTRIC BLUE BOX 'WIN A TRIP TO VEGAS' COMPETITION
TAGLINE 'SOME PEOPLE LIVE LIFE BLOW BY BLOW'
TRAILERS *EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY CHAMPIONS FOREVER MAJOR LEAGUE*
CHERRYPICK THE SIGHT OF CHRISTOPHER WALKEN ATTEMPTING A DIAMOND HEIST DISGUISED AS A HASSIDIC RABBI

DRESSED

like the kind of Roden Drive hustler you might find on the cover of a Country & Western compilation in the bargain bin of a European service station, Mickey Rourke's Johnny Walker moseys into some unnamed, low-rent, out-of-season resort on the shabbier outskirts of Atlantic City like a beautiful denim ghost. Spitting, drooling and farting like a brewery mule, and with nothing to his name but the saddle that's permanently slung across his shoulder and the exaggerated bow-legged gait associated with so many middleweight greats, the Mick – although he may initially appear nothing short of mentally challenged, is a half-decent journeyman prizefighter in town to form the makeweight at the bottom of some grisly backstreet boxing card.

Monosyllabic, partially deaf and with a blurred vision that renders the world in a dizzying slo-mo haze, the Mick tacitly understands – with all the diamond-eyed acuity of a freebasing astronaut – exactly two things: salon-effect hair gel applications and his undying love of thumping people.

The fight in question is, whether by accident or design, quite correctly shambolic (every punch – including body shots – triggers the same sound effect; a noise not dissimilar to that of someone dropping a stack of CDs onto a folding chair). Like watching two drunken Dublin paneloners whaling on each other with fresh-air haymakers and slurred industrial badinage, it's neither exciting nor tasteful, but it does revel in a certain Joycean squalor and at least neither of them has the puff to waste our time with more than a couple of rounds of rusty ringplay. Handed a TKO (and a mop and bucket) after his opponent, Reuben 'Mama's Boy' McKenzie, suffers a full rectal prolapse following a sheaky kidney punch that slipped the ref's eye, the battered Rourkester collects a paltry purse that apparently includes the welcome-or-not friendship of Christopher Walken's madball lounge singer and all-round degenerate sleaze-puppet, Wesley Pendergass.

After swinging by Walken's noxious nightspot just long enough to hear him murdering The Beatles' 'In An Octopus's Garden' with the help of his understated backing band, The Hymans, Mickey waddles out to the town's tumble-down seafront fairground in time to step Stephen Baldwin's gang of Pabst-crazed yoofs from dishing out some generic hassle to Beautiful Carousel Owner, Ruby (Debra Feuer).

A troubled tomboy, Ruby rides a IR52 Indian Chief, sports round shades and lugs a string of panies along with some regulation backstory about a Geppetto-like grandfather who brought her up around the fairground and who, when the kids didn't have no money, let them ride for free. These were simpler times and simple people. Three hours later, Rourke has crossed the city limits having got his end away, enjoyed a punch-up, a piss-up and a heavily filtered motorbike montage. Man, you are going to kick yourself when you find out which puffy-faced schmuck wrote this shinola.

To wrap everything up, Walken lines up a score that he needs Mickey's muscle to pull off. The Mick, against his doctor's advice, accepts a big money fight with a local brawler (ex-IBF Light Middleweight champ Buster Drayton), while Ruby needs a few grand to save her rickety deathtrap from being condemned. Which of the two bonehead plays will the Mickman choose to help out? God only knows: by this stage you'll be echoing that other Great White Hope of 80s middleweights, Panamanian Ioan Roberto Durán, who once threw up his hands in the middle of a title bout with Sugar Ray Leonard and hollered, to anyone who would listen, *'No más, no más!'*

No more, Mickey. No more. ADAM LEE DAVIES

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THE LIST

★★★★
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SHIFTY

15

DANIEL MAYS ***RIZ AHMED*** *AND* ***JASON FLEMYNG***

24 HOURS TO DEAL YOURSELF OUT

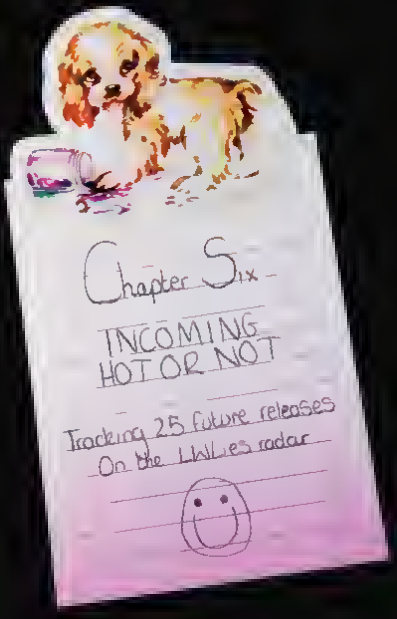


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Chapter Six
INCOMING
HOT OR NOT
Tracking 25 future releases
On the LWLies radar

SHUTTER ISLAND

DIRECTED BY Martin Scorsese **ETA** October 2009

GOSSIP Young Argentine director Celina Murga spent almost two months on the set of Scorsese's drama about an escaped murderer hiding out on Shutter Island while being mentored by the great man. "Each frame is referencing some other film," she tells us. "It's a huge production." Okay, not very insightful but we're excited anyway.

DEAD SNOW

DIRECTED BY Tommy Wirkola **ETA** 2009

FOOTAGE Another acquisition for IFC Films, this is a Norwegian horror outing that sees a group of ski-bound teens facing up to the threat of Nazi zombies. "Eine zwei die!" screams the ridiculous-but-brilliant tagline – and the trailer looks ace too.

THE COVE

DIRECTED BY Louie Psihoyos **ETA** TBC

FESTIVALS The title refers to a cave where the mass slaughter of dolphins is sanctioned by the Japanese government. Louie Psihoyos's documentary doesn't sound like a barrel of laughs, but it bagged an Audience Award at Sundance.

THE RUM DIARY

DIRECTED BY Bruce Robinson **ETA** 2010

GOSSIP Online banter suggests that Johnny Depp has finally agreed to commit to *The Rum Diary*, the adaptation of Hunter S Thompson's first novel. It's about bloody time too – the project has been mooted for years, but then Robinson has never been the most fortunate of filmmakers.

ASTRO BOY

DIRECTED BY David Bowers **ETA** Late 2009

IMAGES A first batch of images has been released for this adaptation of Osamu Tezuka's classic manga. The shots of Astro Boy in flight are rocking a real kiddie vibe, but the background detail looks sumptuous and they really capture a sense of freedom and adventure.

JOHNNY MAD DOG

DIRECTED BY Jean-Stephane Sauvaire **ETA** July 2009

FESTIVALS There's a touch of *City of God* about *Johnny Mad Dog*, a film that uses unknown actors in its portrayal of child soldiers caught in a violent African war. There's strong word-of-mouth following screenings in London and Utah, so perhaps this will win similar levels of acclaim.

THE WOLF MAN

DIRECTED BY Joe Johnston **ETA** November 2009

NEWS Benicio's bark 'em-up has seen its release date pushed back to November – ostensibly to allow for "better marketing". That doesn't sound good. Still, with the legendary Rick Baker handling the special effects, there's no reason to despair just yet.

CENTURION

DIRECTED BY Neil Marshall **ETA** 2010

CASTING Neil Marshall making a Roman epic? That doesn't sound right. Oh, hang on – it's about the battle against the savage Picts, so presumably there's room for cannibals and decapitation. The lucky victims – sorry, actors – are Michael Fassbender, Dominic West and Olga Kurylenko. They'll be in for quite a ride.




trailer



PUBLIC ENEMIES

DIRECTED BY Michael Mann **ETA** July 2009

IMAGES Another issue, another pic of Johnny Depp as John Dillinger. Depp looks moody with a Tommy gun on his shoulder. It still doesn't tell us much, but Mann alive. We badly want to see that gun in action.

THE ROAD

DIRECTED BY John Hillcoat **ETA** Late 2009

GOSSIP Viggo Mortensen doesn't seem too concerned about the delayed release of this post-apocalyptic drama, despite internet nay-saying. "I think they just weren't done," he recently told *The New York Times*. "They figured, This is a book people like and we've only got one chance to put it out, so let's get it right." We agree! The novel is incredible, so Hillcoat better deliver.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

DIRECTED BY Spike Jonze **ETA** November 2009

IMAGES It feels like production on this film has moved at a glacial pace, but the growing trickle of pics suggest the wait will be worth it. The beasties in the latest stills (taken from a new skate deck range) have a mournful quality to them, underlining that this will be no mere child's play.

MOON

DIRECTED BY Duncan Jones **ETA** Late 2009

FOOTAGE This sci-fi thriller currently has five clips floating about the net, but we don't want to see them. *Moon* is supposedly full of surprises, so why spoil the fun? Sam Rockwell stars as a stranded astronaut, and the film also features Snuffbox' genius Matt Berry.

9

DIRECTED BY Shane Acker **ETA** September 2009

FOOTAGE Both Tim Burton and Timur Bekmambetov have attached their names to this extraordinary animation about a group of rag dolls in a post-apocalyptic parallel earth looking for a leader to help them survive. Sound crazy? Check out the trailer, it is.

THE FORBIDDEN PLANET

DIRECTED BY James Cameron **ETA** TBC

GOSSIP Despite the fact that the excitement surrounding *Avatar* is only in its infancy, James Cameron is already looking to his next project. He's said to have flipped for a J Michael Straczynski script for *The Forbidden Planet*, a film he's wanted to make for over a decade. And when you're JC, what you want, you get.

AN EDUCATION

DIRECTED BY Lone Scherfig **ETA** Late 2009

FESTIVALS The big news from Sundance wasn't just in the love given to the films, but also to the performers. In that respect *An Education*'s Carey Mulligan looks like the breakout star. Her turn as a girl coming of age in '60s suburbia looks set to make her America's hottest property.

1066

DIRECTED BY TBC **ETA** 2011

NEWS While *Nottingham* flounders, William Nicholson, the writer behind *Gladiator* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, has had his script for *1066* picked up by UK-based Shine Productions. It's going to be a huge historical epic about William the Conqueror and Harold, the other loser—let's hope us Brits can do it justice.

PUSH: BASED ON THE NOVEL BY SAPPHIRE

DIRECTED BY Lee Daniels ETA TBC

FESTIVALS Lenny Kravitz and Mariah Carey both appear in this tale of a pregnant teen who attempts to turn her life around. Dubious cameos they may be, but neither stopped the Sundance judges from handing over their Grand Prix. It won an Audience Award too, so this should be worth a gander.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

DIRECTED BY Clint Eastwood ETA Early 2010

NEWS Clint Eastwood's hunt for stories that suit his mythic self-importance has brought him to *The Human Factor*, which may get re-titled as *Mandela*. It'll star Morgan Freeman as Mandela and Matt Damon as François Pienaar in a story about race, rugby and – oh wait! We don't care.

FREEOOM FORMULA

DIRECTED BY TBC ETA TBC

NEWS It sounds like a George Bush speech about the Middle East, but it's actually Radical Publishing's pitch for their *Top Gun*-style graphic novel in which a genetically engineered exo-suit racer learns he has the power to change the world. Sounds like a B movie, right? Only most B-movies don't have Bryan Singer attached as producer. Let's see how this one develops.

CORALINE

DIRECTED BY Henry Selick ETA May 2009

FOOTAGE We spoke to Neil Gaiman last year about *Coraline*, and he told us that Henry Selick was the only man he wanted to adapt his freaky fantasy. The new trailer suggests Selick has repaid that faith, capturing the Gothic and grisly tone of the graphic novel to perfection.

NOTTINGHAM

DIRECTED BY Ridley Scott ETA 2010

GOSSIP More excellent rumours are emerging from the heart of Sherwood Forest where the gorgeously svelte Sienna Miller has allegedly left the production because she was making Russell Crowe look fat. That piece of gossip is far too good to fact check.

RAMBO V

GOSSIP DIRECTED BY Sylvester Stallone ETA 2010

Another new Rambo film is in pre-production in Bulgaria, with a script said to be about Rambo's daughter (no, really) who's been kidnapped by some cult or other. Jesus, didn't these people see what he did to the Burmese?! They're going to regret that shit.

THE BOX

DIRECTED BY Richard Kelly ETA November 2009

NEWS Kelly could really do with another decent film to match that rabbit thing he did a while back. *The Box* could go either way but at least one thing has been done right: the score is being handled by Canadian art-rockers The Arcade Fire.



THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN: THE SECRET OF THE UNICORN

DIRECTED BY Steven Spielberg ETA 2011

CASTING The title is unwieldy but the cast is promising. Jamie Bell as Tintin. Andy Serkis as Captain Haddock, and best of all, Simon Pegg and Nick Frost as bumbling detectives Thomson and Thompson. We're also pleased that Joe Cornish (of *Adam & Joe*) is doing the script.

BE CALM AND COUNT TO SEVEN

DIRECTED BY Ramtin Lavafipour ETA TBC

FESTIVALS While Sundance nicks all the attention, Rotterdam continues to host some of the best below the radar indies in the world. Ramtin Lavafipour took the VPRO Tiger Award with *Be Calm And Count To Seven*, a beautifully realised story of the way smuggling has changed the traditional way of life in a Persian fishing village.

GNOMEO AND JULIET

DIRECTED BY Kelly Asbury ETA 2010

WTF?! Out go the Montagues and Capulets, in comes James McAvoy in an animated gang-war between outdoor and indoor gnomes. Lord knows what an indoor gnome is, but Elton John is doing the music. Go figure.

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"Superb performances"
Little White Lies

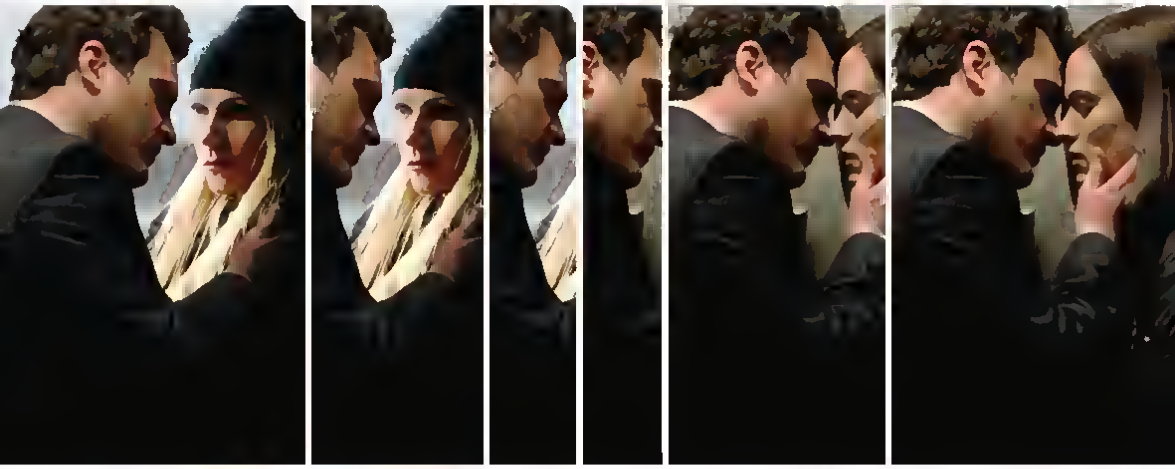
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Grazia

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The Times

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Gwyneth Paltrow
Vinessa Shaw
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TwoLovers

a film by James Gray

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